

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT & PHYSIOTHERAPIST ASSISTANT EDUCATION ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

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### Challenges and Strategies:

#### Volunteering to be a Peer Reviewer for the OTA & PTA Education Accreditation Program

#### 1. My teaching assignments are not always confirmed a year in advance so I don't feel I can commit to dates so far away.

JAC response:

We recruit and confirm peer review team members a year in advance to allow them to avoid conflicts, to protect that time, and to give them a chance to read through the background information and complete a couple of online training modules. The work to review the program begins five months prior to the onsite visit dates when the program submits its Self Study Report. We like to make sure team members are aware of timelines and the need to set aside the required time to meet the responsibilities of the role.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

The advance notice and confirmation is appreciated because I want to be able to accept this commitment as a professional development activity without causing conflict with my professional and personal responsibilities. The more notice I have, the easier it is to negotiate with my Chair and program team for possible modifications to the teaching schedule or alternative options so minimal, if any, coverage is required for my teaching responsibilities. In addition to ensuring that I have support from my Chair and program team, the advance notice is also helpful so I can avoid conflicts with my other planned professional development activities or vacation time.

#### 2. I am responsible for 15 hours of teaching a week and my program chair does not have funding to cover my teaching if I am not here for 2 consecutive days.

JAC Response:

If enough peer reviewers join the pool (ideally 1-2 educators from each program), the OTA & PTA EAP would only require each reviewer to volunteer for a review once every 3-4 years unless they would like to volunteer more often. With fewer reviewers in the pool, each reviewer will be approached more often to join a team.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

Curriculum still has to be delivered in the Fall, Winter or Spring semester however, there are many options for coverage that do not necessarily mean classes have to be cancelled or additional funding is required to cover teaching. When setting up my week-by-week course syllabus, I try to negotiate with other faculty well in advance to cover peer review related absences. To "cover off"

the time away, some educators schedule exams that can be proctored by someone else, arrange for guest speakers, or use blended learning strategies such that the learning activities are available on Blackboard, etc. Offering protected time for group project work or arranging for field trips in the community are other possibilities.

### **3. Can accreditation reviews be scheduled for a Saturday and Sunday to minimize time away from teaching?**

JAC response:

Onsite visits consist of face to face interviews with students, graduates, preceptors, employers, college administration (Dean, etc), admissions committee representatives, program advisory committee members, and faculty. It is unlikely that those groups and individuals would be available on weekends. The team does begin the review on a Sunday afternoon at the hotel, and meets with the program coordinator that afternoon, so a portion of the review is scheduled on a Sunday.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

I have found that the first face to face meeting with members of the Peer Review Team on the Sunday afternoon before the 2 day on-site review is extremely helpful to develop rapport. It also provides us with the opportunity to confirm the division of responsibilities or to identify any issues that have not been resolved. When the program coordinator joins the peer review team later in the afternoon for a quick meeting, I find the time is well spent by filling in the gaps or finalizing the plan to ensure efficient use of time for the 2 day on-site review.

### **4. Can accreditation reviews be scheduled during non-teaching months like May or June?**

JAC Response:

Programs are offered the option of scheduling an onsite visit during any month of the year including May/June and many have chosen May for their onsite visit dates. The program has to ensure that students, graduates, preceptors, employers, college administrators, admissions committee representatives, program advisory committee members, and faculty are available to meet with the team during the visit. If these groups and individuals can be available in May, June, July, August, then the program is welcome to choose those months for their onsite visit.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

It would be helpful if more institutions would consider having the peer review site visit during May to August. Even though students are less available for interviews, there may be a few who live in the area and will come into the college to participate in accreditation similar to how our graduates and field placement supervisors will agree to participate in accreditation. Using Skype calls or other web-based conferencing tools are also a good option. Teaching and curriculum development cycles vary across institutions so it is very helpful to share your availability (which months work best for you) to be a peer reviewer.

## 5. Why does the travel involve another 2 days of absence?

JAC response:

Peer review teams ideally consist of a cross section of members, with a range of experience and who are geographically diverse. In the ideal world, the pool of reviewers would be adequately large enough to draw on more local reviewers (who are not in conflict of interest with the program being reviewed) who would not have to travel extensively to reach the program. With a smaller number of reviewers in the pool, the OTA & PTA EAP must choose those who are available and not in conflict, and sometimes this results in travel across the country (BC to Newfoundland). With flight schedules this may mean travel on the Saturday/Wednesday in order to review a program Sunday-Tuesday.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

Making travel arrangements that take into account my professional and personal schedule is well supported and I appreciate being given the choice and flexibility when scheduling travel. It is not always air travel – driving, taking a train or bus, are also viable options that may be more convenient in some cases.

## 6. I am reluctant to suggest that our part-timers volunteer since they are not familiar with the infra-structure of college programs. They also usually have paid employment outside of the College so why would they be interested?

JAC response:

Eligibility criteria for the educator representatives on peer review teams are that they work at least 90 hours per year in an OTA PTA education program. Many part time educators may not know the infrastructure of college programs, but they seek additional challenges and new learning, and could act as a valuable resource to an education program once they have gained the experience of participating in a review. A part time educator may have more availability than a faculty member to contribute the hours necessary as a reviewer. A part time educator with accreditation experience could act as accreditation advisor to a program preparing a Self Study Report.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

It is advantageous to become familiar with educational programs from across the country. Some employers might see this as a value-added activity and allow the use of flex days. If given the opportunity or invitation, some of our long-standing part-time educators would welcome the opportunity and could add this experience to their professional portfolio.

## 7. I am new to teaching at the College level and I don't feel I have much to offer as an accreditor. I have not even been involved with a program accreditation yet.

JAC Response:

The OTA PTA EAP provides training includes online training modules, provision of a peer review team handbook, constant availability of OTA & PTA EAP staff to answer questions, and the availability of the peer review team chair and other peer review team members to mentor and

lead the process. All educators will be participating as accreditation reviewers for the first time, not only new educators.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

There are shared benefits whenever new or experienced educators get involved with the peer review process. New educators bring a fresh perspective to the table and being involved is a great opportunity to experience the process before your own accreditation.

**8. We already pay hefty annual accreditation fees. Why can't the OTA & PTA EAP fund accreditors? Or, why don't they pay my College to hire teachers to cover me when I am away?**

JAC Response:

Accreditation is seen by most accreditation agencies (see the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada – AAAC – website here: <http://www.aaac.ca/English/WhoWeAre.html>) as a form of professional contribution. Very few accreditation programs in Canada pay their reviewers, although in disciplines where continuing professional development credits are required to maintain licensure, accreditation hours are considered eligible to be counted as required hours. Paying reviewers would result in the need to increase fees further and this would not be supported. The culture of supporting accreditation from an institution perspective is something that likely will evolve in OTA PTA programs and their colleges/universities as knowledge and value of accreditation is better understood.

OTA & PTA Educator Response:

The unpaid hours spent preparing in advance of the site visit, attending the site visit, completing the report post visit and the time spent in travel is significant. The value of volunteering for accreditation is very personal. For some, the chance to collaborate with skilled individuals across the country is an experience that would not normally be possible. Others value the critical thinking, communication and related skill development that occurs when volunteering as a peer reviewer. Beyond contributing to our own scholarly activity and development, serving as a peer reviewer can enhance our own program and the institution at large and ultimately, the occupational therapy and physiotherapy professions.