**Essential requirements for occupational therapy students**

"Essential requirements are those requisites that the institution and program, licensure and certification boards, and the profession respectively have determined to be critical in (a) meeting the competencies, goals, and purpose of the program; and (b) maintaining the safety of the people served in the education process and eventually in the therapeutic arena." (Wells & Hanebrink, 1997, pp. 26).

Students enrolled in Towson University's Occupational Therapy program, preparing to become professionals in occupational therapy, are expected to have essential skills in addition to academic competence. These skills are related to one's ability to function as an occupational therapist and/or an occupational therapy student. While not all skills are needed across all settings, all are essential to occupational therapy practice in general. Thus, essential skills are the physical and mental abilities, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that make up the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of occupational therapy practice. Overlying all domains of function is the need to be ethical in all conduct both as a student and a practitioner.

Essential skills apply to classroom, laboratory, clinical/fieldwork, and professional work environments. They exist to ensure the public that the graduates of our program are prepared to become fully competent and caring occupational therapists. In order to be successful in our program, and as occupational therapy professionals, individuals must be able to demonstrate multiple skills and abilities that span the academic, motor, emotional, and social nature of our profession. Where appropriate, the individual must be able to perform all listed essential functions **with or without reasonable accommodations**.

Ethics

* Commitment to the Towson University Academic Integrity policy, Code of Ethics of the profession and behavior that reflects honesty, integrity, and a sense of right and wrong in the helping environment.

Ensuring Safety

* The ability to ensure the safety of self and others within the occupational therapy practice setting, during all occupational therapy activities.

Affective Domain

* The ability and commitment to work and interact with individuals without regard to the nature of their illness or disability, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, or age group.
* Commitment to the policies of the university, the occupational therapy program, fieldwork sites, and places of employment. This includes matters ranging from professional dress and behavior, to adhering to academic and/or facility schedules, which are subject to change.
* Emotional health for utilization of intellect, the exercise of good judgment, prompt completion of responsibilities and the development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with others.
* Ability to perform in stressful situations, such as meeting deadlines.

Cognitive Domain

* Cognitive abilities needed to integrate information from all courses throughout the curriculum, leading to effective clinical reasoning and problem solving. This requires the basic ability to absorb and integrate information as it is presented, and progresses to the ability to integrate and apply information to clinical problem solving. Thus, students are expected to move from the basic skills of understanding and memorizing information, to more advanced cognitive skills that involve analysis of information and situations and appropriate application of that knowledge in the classroom and fieldwork setting.
* The ability to communicate verbally and in writing, using appropriate grammar and vocabulary. This skill is needed in order to build relationships with faculty, advisors, fellow graduate students, fieldwork supervisors, coworkers and clients, their families, and their significant others. Further, it is essential in the clinical environment when interacting with clients, caregivers/significant others, and other professionals. Proficiency in communication includes transactions with individuals and groups in learner, collegial, supervisee, consultative, leadership and task roles. Students must be able to elicit and gather information and describe findings.
* The cognitive and perceptual ability to work with clients in varied practice settings, insuring the safety of clients, significant others, and staff.
* The organizational skills and stamina for performing required tasks and assignments within allotted time frames; the ability to travel to and from classes, fieldwork assignments, and work on time.
* Critical thinking skills in order to problem solve creatively, master abstract ideas and synthesize information in order to handle the challenges of the academic, laboratory, and fieldwork settings.

Psychomotor Domain

* The capacity to prepare for and respond to the challenges of any environment that requires a readiness for immediate and appropriate response. This requires training for emergencies as delineated within specific clinical environments (e.g., CPR, infection control), and a readiness and willingness to respond as needed.
* The physical ability and capacity (i.e. balance, strength, and flexibility) to safely position the client or oneself to enable accomplishment of such things as range of motion, manual muscle testing, transfers, and pertinent activities of daily living. This applies to all practice settings.
* Physical status permitting one to assume necessary workloads, and adapt to changing and challenging environments. These skills require flexibility and a spirit of cooperation.
* The ability to complete tasks within specified timeframes appropriate to either the clinic or the classroom. Timeframes are determined based on the environment, but will be consistent with the expectations occupational therapists are likely to encounter in actual clinical practice.

(Adapted with permission from Virginia Commonwealth University 3/15)

1997 Wells, S.A. & Hanebrink S. (1997) Technical standards and essential requirements. In *Educating College Students with Disabilities*(p.15-35), American Occupational Therapy Association, Bethesda, MD.

1997 Wells, S.A. & Hanebrink, S. (1997) Auxiliary aids, academic adjustments, and reasonable

accommodations. In *Educating College Students with Disabilities*(p.37-49), American Occupational Therapy Association, Bethesda, MD.