VI. B. POLICY ON CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE

In keeping with its responsibility to the public, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) has clearly delineated policies regarding confidentiality and disclosure.

STATEMENT ON CONFIDENTIALITY

ACOTE maintains the confidentiality of information collected during the accreditation process. Materials such as Reports of Self-Study, Plans of Correction, Progress Reports, Annual Reports, and Interim Reports to ACOTE are considered confidential and are accessible only to AOTA Accreditation Department staff and members of the evaluating bodies of ACOTE. Written permission must be secured from the authorities of the educational institution prior to release of this information to any other individual or group, except when this released information does not disclose the identity of the educational institution or is required to meet recognition criteria of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) or Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

During discussions related to review and evaluation of specific programs, strict safeguards of confidentiality are maintained. These meetings are closed and the minutes are kept confidential. Meetings may be open during discussion of general accreditation procedures. During open meetings, participants avoid references to specific programs by name or through elaborate descriptions.

To ensure that accurate and current information regarding student outcomes is readily available to the public, AOTA Accreditation Department staff may release a program's 3-year aggregate national certification examination pass rate data that is obtained directly from the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT). Statistical summaries that do not specifically reveal information about individual programs may also be disclosed. ACOTE shall not be responsible for attempts to use general information disclosed by ACOTE to identify specific programs.

STATEMENT ON DISCLOSURE

Information regarding ACOTE: The scope, policies, procedures, and decisions of ACOTE are described in official documents and are available to the public through the ACOTE Web site (www.acoteonline.org). Relevant policies and procedures are disseminated to educational programs on a regular basis.

Information relevant to decisions on accreditation status: Lists of all ACOTE-accredited, developing, and applicant occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant educational programs are available to the public through the ACOTE Web site (www.acoteonline.org). Each program listing includes complete contact information for the program, the level(s) of the program accredited, and the academic year of the next scheduled on-site evaluation. A list of accredited and developing programs is also published annually in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*.

The definitions of the specific categories of accreditation are presented in the introduction to the listing as follows:

ACCREDITATION:
The program is in substantial compliance with the Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, Accreditation Standards for a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, or Accreditation Standards for an Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant.

PROBATIONARY ACCREDITATION:
At the occasion of its most recent review, the program was not in substantial compliance with one or more of the Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, Accreditation Standards for a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, or Accreditation Standards for an Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROBATIONARY ACCREDITATION:
The program did/does not comply with one or more of the administrative requirements for maintaining accreditation (e.g., paying a fee or filing a report in a timely manner).

The listing published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* does not specify which of the three accreditation categories applies to each individual program. Those programs on probation are included in the listing without differentiation from the other accredited programs, since Probationary Accreditation is an accreditation status. Probationary Accreditation status and the findings made in connection with the action taken, together with the official comments of the affected institution are, however, disclosed on the ACOTE Web site, where those listings can be kept current.

If inquiries, written or verbal, are received regarding the accreditation status of a program, the inquirer is told:

1. whether the program is accredited,

2. the specific accreditation category,

3. the definition of the applicable accreditation category, and

4. the next review date.

If the status is Probationary Accreditation, the inquirer is also provided with the information that appears on the ACOTE Web site and referred to the program for further, current information regarding the reason(s) for the probation and the program's progress in addressing the reason(s).

NOTIFICATION TO THE USDE, STATE REGULATORY AUTHORITIES, INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITING AGENCIES, AND THE PUBLIC

Within 30 days after a decision is made, the United States Department of Education (USDE), appropriate state regulatory authority, appropriate institutional accrediting agency, and the public are notified of the following types of ACOTE decisions:

1. A decision to grant Developing Program Status to an applicant program.

2. A decision to grant, defer action on, or deny a Letter of Review to a developing program.

3. A decision to award initial accreditation or reaccreditation to a program.

4. A decision to change a program's status to Accreditation—Inactive at the request of the institution.

5. A decision to change a program's status to Accreditation Withdrawn—Voluntary at the request of the institution.

Notification of all final ACOTE accreditation actions is sent to the USDE within 30 days after a decision is made. The public is notified of all final actions via a posting on ACOTE's Web site and an article in *OT Practice*, the official bimonthly publication of AOTA.

The USDE, the appropriate state regulatory authority, and the appropriate institutional accrediting agency will be notified of the following types of decisions at the same time as the program.

1. A decision by ACOTE to place a program on probation.

2. A final decision by ACOTE to deny Developing Program Status, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation of a program.

No later than 60 days after a final decision by ACOTE to deny Developing Program Status, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation, the USDE, appropriate state regulatory authority, and the public, are provided a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the adverse action and the comments, if any, that the affected institution or program may wish to make regarding that decision.

ACOTE also will provide the following information to the USDE:

1. A copy of the AOTA Annual Report.

2. An updated copy of the list of accredited and developing occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs after each ACOTE meeting at which program actions are taken.

3. If requested by the Secretary of the USDE, a summary of ACOTE's major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary).

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF PROBATIONARY ACCREDITATION OR FINAL ADVERSE ACTIONS

Final decisions to place a program on Probationary Accreditation, deny Developing Program Status, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation will be publicly disclosed via a posting on the AOTA Web site within 24 hours of:

1. Confirmation that the program has received notification of ACOTE's decision to place the program on Probationary Accreditation;

2. Confirmation that the program has received notification of ACOTE's final decision to deny Developing Program Status, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation (subsequent to an appeal); or

3. The conclusion of the allowable period for appeal of ACOTE's decision to deny Developing Program Status, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation (in the absence of an appeal).

Final decisions to place a program on Probationary Accreditation, deny Developing Program Status, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation will also be disclosed in an *OT Practice* article and in response to written or verbal inquiries.

OPPORTUNITY FOR THIRD-PARTY COMMENT

Notice of the dates when a program is scheduled for an initial accreditation or reaccreditation on-site evaluation will be posted on ACOTE's Web site and published in *OT Practice*, the official bimonthly publication of AOTA, to provide an opportunity for written third-party comment concerning the program's qualifications for accreditation. (See ACOTE Accreditation Manual VI.H., Policy on Third-Party Comment.)

PROGRAM FAILURE TO MEET TITLE IV, HEA REQUIREMENTS OR ENGAGEMENT IN FRAUDULENT ACTIVITY

ACOTE will notify the Secretary of the USDE in writing of the name of any program accredited by ACOTE that ACOTE has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse. The written notification shall document the reason for the agency's concern. The notification to USDE shall be copied to the educational program.

If the Secretary requests, ACOTE will provide information that may bear upon an accredited or preaccredited institution's compliance with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, including the eligibility of the institution or program to participate in Title IV, HEA programs.

PUBLIC NOTICE OF CHANGE IN ACOTE ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

If ACOTE determines, at any point during its systematic program of review, that it needs to make changes to the *Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist*, *Accreditation Standards for a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist*, or *Accreditation Standards for an Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant*, ACOTE will initiate action within 12 months to make the changes and will complete that action within a reasonable period of time. Before finalizing any changes to the Standards, ACOTE will provide advance public notice of proposed new or revised Standards. ACOTE will provide adequate opportunity for broad comment from the academic community and the public prior to adoption of proposed changes to ACOTE Standards.

- An article detailing the proposed changes in the Standards and requesting comment on the proposal prior to its adoption will be posted on the AOTA Web site and published in *OT Practice*, the official bimonthly publication of AOTA.

- ACOTE will directly notify all educational programs in its accreditation system of proposed changes in the Standards and will request written comment on the proposal prior to adoption.

ACOTE will notify the Secretary of the USDE in writing of any changes in its policies, procedures, or accreditation standards that might alter ACOTE's scope of recognition or its compliance with the USDE requirements for notification to the Secretary.