

Creating a Successful Career in Art Therapy:

Advising Guide for Psychology Faculty and Students

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**Creating a Successful Career in Art Therapy:**

**Advising Guide for Psychology Faculty and Students**

Art therapy is a mental health profession that utilizes art making and creativity to help clients strengthen their overall well-being (American Art Therapy Association, 2013-a). According to Rubin (2010), art therapy work requires “a deep understanding of art and the creative process with an equally sophisticated understanding of psychology and psychotherapy” (p. 26). More specifically, art therapy applies the therapist’s psychological knowledge and skills in human development and counseling theory with the fine arts (e.g., the skills of drawing, painting, or ceramics).

The field of art therapy was first defined as a discipline in England in the 1940s and was brought to the United States in the 1950s. By the 1960s, psychiatric and rehabilitation centers began including art therapy programs in their treatment protocols (Deaver, 2014). Early momentum was strong, and the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), formed in 1969 (Junge, 2010), established their guidelines for education in 1979 (Brooke, 2006). The field integrates Jungian, Freudian, Gestalt, and cognitive-behavioral counseling theory; psychopathology (e.g., education on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition,* American Psychiatric Association, 2013; see also AATA, 2007); cultural diversity; and human development with art-related education including fine arts, stages of artistic development, and art media usage. From this integration, art therapy has developed its own fascinating, complex, and rich theories, research, and practices (e.g., Kagin and Lusebrink’s, 1984, Expressive Therapies Continuum and art-therapy based research).

Nationally, psychology is one of the top three undergraduate majors (Halonen, 2011). The National Center on Education Statistics (2016) noted that “psychology was the field in which there was the largest percentage increase in [associate] degrees conferred between 2003–04 and 2013–14 (299 percent, from 1,900 to 7,500 degrees)” (U.S. Department of Education,2016) and in 2013-2014, 6% of the 1.9 million conferred bachelor’s degrees were in psychology (U.S. Department of Education,2016). Although many students are attracted to psychology because they want to “help people” (Halonen, 2011), they likely remain unaware of the broad skills that a psychology major provides (Kuther, 2012). An undergraduate education in psychology develops a wide range of knowledge and skills that include psychological concepts and theories, ethical and social issues, scientific reasoning, critical thinking, and oral and written communication (American Psychological Association [APA]*,* 2013). These skills can be easily transferred to related fields.

During their undergraduate education, many students learn that a doctorate is required to be a psychologist (Kuther 2012) and one fourth of all psychology majors go on to attend graduate school after completing the bachelor’s degree (Tsapogas, 2004), with the majority of these students pursuing a master’s degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Yet faculty advisors may lack information about the different types of master’s degrees available to psychology undergraduates or may not know the specific requirements needed to enter master’s programs in certain specialized areas. For example, the knowledge and skills developed in the undergraduate psychology major are actually prerequisites for all approved art therapy graduate programs. However, without fine arts coursework too, psychology students may experience a significant delay in meeting the requirements for admission to art therapy programs. For students with the unique combination of knowledge and skills in psychology and fine arts, the field of art therapy is a perfect fit. Adding the career option of art therapist may pique students’ interests and passions that may otherwise be untapped. How can undergraduate psychology programs introduce students to the field of art therapy and help them be competitive candidates for master’s programs in art therapy?Faculty advisors who are aware of the complex nature of the field of art therapy and can provide ways to traverse the application and licensure process can help undergraduate psychology majors create a successful career as art therapists.

There is minimal research on advising undergraduate students about the field and practice of art therapy. In fact, APA’s Division 10: Society for the Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts (<http://www.div10.org/>) does not include information for undergraduates on art therapy. The site does offer basic information on “art as therapy,” but it does not provide data for those interested in pursuing this profession. Finally, although AATA has no formal committee on undergraduate education, they do provide focus group discussions on this topic at their national conference (Havlena, 2016).

Taylor (1991) noted that master’s students who lack knowledge about the field of art therapy may also “lack experience and this may lead to false expectations and disappointment” (p. 44). First, this absence of exposure to the field may lead to misperceptions about the realities of the profession, job opportunities, and income potential. Second, students should be prepared for field-specific requirements needed to enter an art therapy graduate program such as having coursework in fine arts and psychology and creating a portfolio of their artwork. If students are not adequately prepared, they may spend additional time and incur added expense to meet the minimal requirements for admission.

The purpose of this paper is to provide advisors and students with specific information about admission requirements to art therapy graduate programs and other issues specific to the practice of art therapy. This resource provides information about navigating the prerequisites for master’s programs, the graduate school application process, and unique challenges in the field. Part 1 of the paper examines AATA Approved Graduate Programs’ website and identifies specific psychology and fine arts courses required for admission. Part 2 of this paper provides basic information about art therapists’ average salary, job outlook, places of employment, licensure, and additional issues that students should be aware of prior to entering a graduate program in art therapy.

**Method**

To compile the information needed to adequately advise students in applying to graduate school in art therapy, I reviewed the 34 programs with a designation of “approved” as listed on the AATA website (<http://arttherapy.org/aata-educational-programs/>). Only AATA-Approved art therapy graduate programs were reviewed for this study. Table 1 lists the graduate programs with hyperlinks and types of art therapy degree(s). Included is information about other accredited programs available at the school for those students who may want to double major or supplement an accredited counseling or psychology program with art therapy classes. I have also included a section later in this paper that describes the difference between approved versus accredited programs (see section entitled “*Graduate Program Accreditation versus Approval”*).

**Part 1: Review of Major Approved Art Therapy**

**Programs and the Application Requirements**

Table 1

*Art Therapy Degrees Offered by AATA-Approved Institutions and Accreditation by Other Mental Health Counseling Fields*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Institution by State or Country | Degree(s) Offered | Additional Accredited Programs Availablea |
| California |  |  |
| [Loyola Marymount University](http://cfa.lmu.edu/programs/mft/) | Marriage and Family Therapy |  |
| [Notre Dame de Namur University](http://www.ndnu.edu/arts-and-sciences/graduate/art-therapy/) | MAAT, Post MA, PhD |  |
| [Phillips Graduate Institute](http://www.pgu.edu/ma-in-psychology-marriage-and-family-therapy-art-therapy-overview.html) | MFT Art Therapy |  |
| Canada |  |  |
| [Concordia University](http://www.concordia.ca/finearts/creative-arts-therapies/programs/art-therapy-ma.html) | MAAT |  |
| Colorado |  |  |
| [Naropa University](https://www.naropa.edu/academics/masters/clinical-mental-health-counseling/art-therapy/) | CMHC with AT specialization |  |
| Connecticut |  |  |
| [Albert Magnus College](http://www.albertus.edu/art-therapy/ms/) | MAAT |  |
| District of Columbia |  |  |
| [The George Washington University](https://arttherapy.columbian.gwu.edu/) | MAAT and BAAT | CACREP, APA Probation |
| Florida |  |  |
| [Florida State University](http://arted.fsu.edu/programs/art-therapy/) | MSAT | CACREP, APA |
| Illinois |  |  |
| [Adler School of Professional Psychology](http://www.adler.edu/page/areas-of-study/chicago/art-therapy/overview) | MA in Counseling, Art Therapy | APA |
| [School of the Art Institute of Chicago](http://www.saic.edu/academics/graduatedegrees/maat/) | MAAT |  |
| [Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville](http://www.siue.edu/artsandsciences/art/arttherapy/) | Art Therapy Counseling |  |
| Indiana |  |  |
| [Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College](http://www.smwc.edu/graduate/maat/) | MAAT |  |
| Kansas |  |  |
| [Emporia State University](http://www.emporia.edu/teach/ce/art-therapy/index.html) | Art Therapy Counseling | CACREP |
| Kentucky |  |  |
| [University of Louisville](http://louisville.edu/education/degrees/med-cps-at) | Counseling and Personnel Services with AT | CACREP, COAMFTE, APA |
| Massachusetts |  |  |
| [Lesley University](http://www.lesley.edu/master-of-arts/expressive-therapies/art-therapy/mental-health-counseling/?terms=art%20therapy) | CMHC with AT specialization |  |
| [Springfield College](http://springfield.edu/academic-programs/visual-and-performing-arts/art-therapy#.UzL9RiifuME) | Art Therapy/ Counseling |  |
| Michigan |  |  |
| [Wayne State University, Detroit](http://coe.wayne.edu/ted/art-therapy/) | Art Education with AT/ Counseling with AT | CACREP, APA |
| Minnesota |  |  |
| [Adler Graduate School](http://alfredadler.edu/programs/masters/art-therapy) | Counseling/ MFT with emphasis on AT/ post MA |  |
| New Jersey |  |  |
| [Caldwell College](https://www.caldwell.edu/graduate/grad-academic-programs/psychology-and-counseling/ma-counsel-art) | Counseling with AT specialization | CACREP |
| New Mexico |  |  |
| [Southwestern College](https://www.swc.edu/degree-program-intro/ma-in-art-therapycounseling/#.UzMP3SifuME) | Art Therapy/ Counseling |  |
| New York |  |  |
| [College of New Rochelle](http://www.cnr.edu/web/graduate-school/art-therapy-counseling/) | Art Therapy/ Counseling |  |
| [Hofstra University](http://www.hofstra.edu/academics/colleges/health-human/macat/index.html) | Creative Arts Therapy | CACREP, APA |
| [Long Island University - Post Campus](http://www.liu.edu/CWPost/Academics/Schools/SVPA/Dept/Art/Graduate-Programs/MA-Art-Therapy-Counseling) | Art Therapy and Counseling | CACREP, APA |
| [Nazareth College of Rochester](https://www2.naz.edu/dept/creative-arts-therapy/) | Creative Arts Therapy, Specialization in AT |  |
| [New York University](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/art/therapy) | MAAT | APA |
| [Pratt Institute](https://www.pratt.edu/academics/school-of-art/graduate-school-of-art/creative-arts-therapy/creative-arts-therapy-degrees/art-therapy-and-creativity-development-mps/) | Art Therapy and Creativity Dev, Post MA |  |
| [School of Visual Arts](http://www.sva.edu/graduate/mps-art-therapy) | MPS Art Therapy |  |
| Ohio |  |  |
| [Ursuline College](http://www.ursuline.edu/Academics/Graduate_Professional/Masters_Programs/Art/index.html) | Art Therapy and Counseling |  |
| Oregon |  |  |
| [Marylhurst University](http://www.marylhurst.edu/admissions/admission-requirements/art-therapy-counseling-admissions/) | Art Therapy Counseling |  |
| Pennsylvania |  |  |
| [Drexel University](http://www.drexel.edu/artsTherapies/programs/artTherapy/) | Art Therapy and Counseling | COAMFTE, APA |
| [Marywood University](http://www.marywood.edu/art/undergraduate-programs/art-therapy.html) | MAAT | CACREP, APA |
| [Seton Hill University](http://www.setonhill.edu/academics/graduate_programs/art_therapy) | Art Therapy, Specialization counseling | APA |
| Virginia |  |  |
| [Eastern Virginia Medical School](http://www.evms.edu/education/masters_programs/art_therapy_counseling_program/) | Art Therapy and Counseling |  |
| Washington |  |  |
| [Antioch University](http://www.antiochseattle.edu/academics/ma-counseling-family-therapy/art-therapy/) | Counseling AT spec or MFT AT spec | CACREP, COAMFTE |
| Wisconsin |  |  |
| [Mount Mary College,](http://mtmary.edu/majors-programs/graduate/art-therapy/index.html/graduate.htm) | MSAT | CACREP |

aAll of the programs above are currently approved through the American Art Therapy Association’s Educational Programs Approval Board (EPAB). Accredited Programs, where noted, from the Council on Accreditation of Counseling & Related Education Programs (CACREP), the American Psychological Association Accreditation (APA), or the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE).

**Results**

**Name of Degree Offered**

The names of the master’s degrees offered in art therapy varied. The largest percentage of programs (52.9%, *n* = 18) offered master’s degrees that included the words “Art Therapy” and “Counseling.” Ten of the programs (29.4%) named the degree as a Masters of Art in Art Therapy (MAAT). Five (14.5%) of the programs offer an art therapy degree with a marriage and family therapy (MFT) focus. Currently only five states (Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, & New Mexico) have a license for art therapists, whereas in another five states (New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Wisconsin, & Utah), art therapists are licensed under other professional licenses. These licensure issues make practicing and obtaining insurance-reimbursement difficult in states that do not have an art therapy license. To remedy this situation, some art therapists have pursued additional education in the field of counseling in order to qualify for the state’s counseling license. Additionally, several graduate programs are now incorporating counseling or marriage and family coursework into their art therapy programs to meet licensure requirements. **Psychology Course Prerequisites**

All programs require a minimum of 12 credits in psychology although five programs require 15-24 credits of psychology (average psychology credits required is 12.7). All programs require abnormal psychology and most programs require lifespan development. Approximately half of the programs require introduction to psychology and personality. A few programs require statistics, introduction to art therapy, or research methods. Fewer than two programs require a course in art history or counseling theories. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of programs requiring psychology courses.

Table 2

*Percentage and Number of Programs Requiring Psychology Courses*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Course | Percentage and Number of Programs Requiring Course |
| Abnormal | 100.0% (*n* = 34) |
| Developmental/Lifespana | 91.1% (*n* = 31) |
| Introduction to Psychology | 52.9% (*n* = 18) |
| Personality | 50.0% (*n* = 17) |
| Statistics | 11.7% (*n* = 4) |
| Introduction to Art Therapy | 11.7% (*n* = 4) |
| Research Methods | 8.8% (*n* = 3) |

aFour programs were willing to accept Child, Adolescent, or Adult Development in place of Lifespan

**Fine Art Course Prerequisites**

All but one program required at least 18 credit hours of fine arts. Twenty-two programs required a course in painting, drawing, and clay. Four programs required a course in sculpture, and one program required a course in mixed media. Several programs accept evidence of proficiency for different areas as documented by one’s art work, training, or experience. Table 3 shows the percentage and number of programs requiring fine art courses.

Table 3

*Percentage and Number of Programs Requiring Fine Art Courses*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Course | Percentage and Number of Programs Requiring Course |
| Painting | 64.7% (*n* = 22) |
| Drawing | 64.7% (*n* = 22) |
| Clay | 64.7% (*n* = 22) |
| Sculpture | 11.7% (*n* = 4) |
| Mixed Media | 2.9% (*n* = 1) |

**Other Application Criteria**

All approved programs want to see a portfolio of artwork. Many programs noted that students should show a range of media (drawing, painting, sculpture) and be able to discuss their work in psychological terms (e.g., What does the piece say about the student? How is the student reflected in the piece?). Images must be labeled with the date, medium, and title and ensure the file is transmittable in a variety of formats.

Approximately 60% of programs request a statement of intent; about half of the programs ask for letters of recommendation. It is important to note that several programs prefer candidates with experience in the field. These experiences do not necessarily involve art therapy but can include crisis work, volunteer work, tutoring, mentoring, and so on. The average minimum grade point average (GPA) for acceptance into graduate programs is 2.95. Table 4 lists additional required materials for graduate school applications.

Table 4

*Percentage and Number of Programs Requiring Other Criteria*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Criteria | Percentage and Number of Programs Requiring Other Criteria |
| Portfolio of Artwork | 100.0% (*n* = 34) |
| Letter/ Statement of Intent | 58.8% (*n* = 20) |
| Letters of Recommendation | 47.0% (*n* = 16)a |
| Interview | 35.2% (*n* = 12) |
| Clinical Experience | 26.5% (*n* = 9) |
| Resume | 20.5% (*n* = 7) |
| Writing Sample | 11.7% (*n* = 4) |
| Autobiography | 11.7% (*n* = 4) |
| Average GPA  Programs requiring 3.0 | 2.95 35.2% (*n* = 12) |
| GRE MAT GRE or MAT | 14.7% (*n* = 5)  2.9% (*n* = 1)  5.8% (*n* = 2) |

*Note.* GPA = Grade Point Average; GRE = Graduate Record Examination;

MAT = Miller Analogies Test  
aMost programs require 3 letters.

**Part 2: Navigating the Profession**

This portion of the paper presents information about the profession of art therapy for faculty advisors and students. Basic information covers average salary, job outlook, places of employment, licensure issues, and additional pertinent issues.   
**Average Salary and Job Outlook**

According to the AATA 2013 Membership Survey (Elkins & Deaver, 2015), the average salary for an art therapist ranges from $30,000 to $79,999. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) noted the median annual salary of art therapists in 2015 was $45,809 ($22.06 per hour). In 2014, 19,000 people worked as art therapists (for comparison, 155,000 clinical psychologists were employed in the same year). The job outlook for art therapists is expected to grow faster than average (an expected 9-13% growth or 6,600 positions in the next 10 years).   
**Places of Employment**

The 2013 AATA Membership Survey (Elkins & Deaver, 2015) revealed a wide range of employment settings for art therapists. The largest number of art therapists reported working in private practice (21.3% of respondents). The next most popular work settings, ranging from approximately 10% to 15%, were college/university, K-12 education, outpatient mental health clinics, and adult psychiatric hospitals.  
**State Licensure Issues**

One major challenge facing art therapists is obtaining a state license to practice psychotherapy. “The license serves to protect the public from potential harm that may be caused when a non-qualified person promotes himself/herself as a qualified practitioner” (AATA, n.d.-b). Many graduate programs have expanded their academic offerings to include courses to meet state licensure requirements for counseling or marriage and family therapy so that students can practice under these licenses. However, the fields of counseling and marriage and family therapy keep narrowing their licensing requirements, which may eventually exclude art therapists from these licenses (AATA, n.d.-b).

Currently, five states offer an art therapy specific license (Kentucky, Mississippi, Maryland, New Jersey, & New Mexico,). Five other states allow art therapists to practice under related licenses (New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, & Wisconsin; AATA, n.d.-a). Many other states are diligently working towards art therapy-specific licenses so the numbers above may increase. In the meantime, what should students know?

Students need to be aware of the licensing requirements in the state they wish to practice (AATA, 2013-b). Many art therapy programs have demonstrated flexibility around their requirements in an effort to meet varying state licensing requirements. Students may also consider attending a program where an accredited degree in counseling, psychology, or marriage and family therapy is also available (see Table 1). Students attending these programs can explore pursuing a dual major to meet the requirements of both the accredited program and the approved program in art therapy.

A more traditional option is for students to pursue a counseling, marriage and family therapy, or related degree through an accredited program, and to supplement their education with 24 graduate level credit hours in art therapy core curriculum classes and then obtain art therapy clinical experience and supervision (see detailed requirements at <http://www.atcb.org/New_Applicants/RequiredEducation> ). This route provides students with a higher likelihood of state licensure and enables them to also apply for art therapy credentials.

**Art Therapy “Licensure”**

Because the field of art therapy does not have its own license, art therapists become “registered” by meeting post-master’s requirements. This qualification is granted by the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB). The requirements for “registration” (entitled “Registered Art Therapist” or ATR) includes 1000 hours of direct client contact art therapy work and 100 hours of supervision (50% of the supervision must be supervised by an ATR). Once registration is completed, applicants may take a national exam to become “Board Certified” (noted as BC). At the American Art Therapy Conference in July 2016, the ATCB informed the art therapy community that all art therapy supervisors will be required to have the registration and board certification by 2018 to qualify as a supervisor for master- and post-master-level students (McAlevey, Anand, & Towne, 2016)*.*

**Graduate Program Accreditation Versus Approval**

At the Coalition of Art Therapy Educators’ Pre-Conference, the Accreditation Council for Art Therapy Education (Elmendorf, 2016) discussed several changes to the approval process for graduate programs. Currently art therapy programs are approved by the AATA’s Educational Programs Approval Board. In the next year, this approval process will be replaced by the Accreditation Council on Art Therapy Education.

Additionally, AATA has chosen to work towards accreditation under the accrediting body of the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) that overseas “2100 entry-level education programs in 28 professions” (AATA, 2015, p. 3). The Association chose CAAHEP rather than the Council on Accreditation of Counseling & Related Education Programs (CACREP) because of the counseling profession’s 20/20 Vision for the Future of Counseling. In 2020, state boards will license only those who graduate from CACREP-Accredited counseling programs, thus excluding graduates of Master’s of Art Therapy programs that are not counseling focused from license eligibility. This 20/20 Vision seeks to emphasize the “counselor” identity at the cost of an art therapy identity. It is important to note that current CACREP Accreditation standards also require that programs have a core faculty with doctorates in counselor education, which would exclude most of the faculty in the art therapy approved programs (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs,2016*.*). It would also be difficult for programs to cover 20/20 Vision curriculum requirements as well as cover essential components of the art therapy curriculum (D. Elmendorf, personal communication, July 29, 2016). Thus, AATA’s decision to pursue CAAHEP Accreditation will allow for more freedom and flexibility in the identity and requirements of master’s programs in art therapy.

**Summary**

Art therapy integrates the knowledge of and skills in psychology and fine arts. The integration of these two areas has birthed the rich and complex field of art therapy. An undergraduate degree in psychology meets many of the course requirements and basic skills needed for entering this field of study, but students need to know about the additional requirements needed to gain admissions to art therapy programs. Familiarity with the prerequisites for a master’s degree in art therapy as well as other criteria needed to gain admission is important for faculty advisors and students. Advisors and students will also appreciate information about licensing issues as students might find ways to qualify as both a counseling or a marriage and family therapy license as well as a registered art therapist. Using the information in this document will ease the application and licensure process for psychology students to make art therapy a viable, realistic career option. Figure 1 provides a summary of the recommendations discussed throughout this paper.

*Figure 1.* Summary of stages of preparation for creating a successful career in art therapy.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Undergraduate Preparation** | | |
| **Psychology Courses**  (12 Credits)  Abnormal  Lifespan  Introduction to Psychology  Personality | **Fine Arts Courses**  (18 Credits)  At least 1 course in drawing, painting, and ceramics | **Additional Preparation**  Art Portfolio  Statement of Intent  Recommendation Letters  Clinical Experience |

*Note.* See Tables 2, 3, and 4 for more specific details about course requirements.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Graduate School Options** | | |
| Attend dually accredited and AATA approved program | Attend non-art therapy counseling program and complete 24 credit hours in art therapy | Attend approved art therapy program and complete additional courses to meet state licensure requirements | |
| Dually supervised internship | Additional hours of clinical work will be required for registration in art therapy | See state licensure requirements for internship requirements but state requirements are changing. | |

*Note.* See Table 1 for additional information about programs.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Post-Masters Required Clinical Hours for Registration in Art Therapy** | | |
| 1000 hours plus supervision; seek dual supervision to have hours count towards dual license | 2000 hours plus supervision | 1000 hours plus supervision; seek dual supervision to have hours count towards dual license | |

Average salary for art therapists is $30,000-$79,999 (Elkins & Deaver, 2015). Median annual salary for art therapists is $45,809 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Job outlook for art therapists is expected to grow by 9-13% over the next 10 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

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