



Orthotic and Prosthetic Professional Standards and Qualifications

Introduction

Following is an overview of requirements to achieve and/or maintain the credentials of Certified Orthotist (CO), Certified Prosthetist (CP), and Certified Prosthetist/Orthotist (CPO). These specialized professionals leverage their education, experience, and skills to provide comprehensive orthotic and/or prosthetic (O&P) care. This overview may be useful to a person who is seeking to compare the qualifications of certified orthotics and prosthetics professions with other health professionals.

Entry Standards and Program Development

The entry-level education requirement for the O&P profession has steadily advanced over the years. The current entry-level degree requirement is a master's degree, and several institutions of higher education have developed education programs designed to educate and train prospective orthotics and prosthetics professionals. The [Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs \(CAAHEP\)](#) is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for accredited programs that result in an associate, baccalaureate, or master's degree. CAAHEP was established as a nonprofit agency on July 1, 1994, and is the largest specialized accreditation system in the country, accrediting educational programs in 23 disciplines. Today CAAHEP is a dynamic allied health agency comprising representatives from professional allied health organizations and related specialty and education groups, including 19 Committees on Accreditation (CoAs). These representatives form what is called the Commission.

The [National Commission on Orthotic and Prosthetic Education \(NCOPE\)](#) serves in cooperation with CAAHEP to accredit O&P education programs. NCOPE is a sponsor CoA in the CAAHEP system. Each CoA comprises experts who assess applicant programs to ensure they meet the nationally accepted standards that are designed to prepare graduates for entry into the healthcare workforce. The accreditation standards are developed and adopted in collaboration with CAAHEP member-sponsors. Once an applicant program's formal application and CoA review process is complete, the designed CoA forwards program accreditation recommendations to CAAHEP for review to ensure they adhere to the principles of due process and are devoid of any conflicts of interest. CAAHEP awards accreditation to those programs that meet or exceed the national standards. NCOPE develops, implements, and assures compliance with standards for O&P education through accreditation and approval processes that promote exemplary patient care.



CAAHEP has developed a Core Curriculum for Orthotists and Prosthetists, and educational programs are overseen according to its requirements. While broad in scope, the Core Curriculum is focused on the specifics of O&P care. The document can be found on the CAAHEP website: www.caahep.org/CAAHEP/media/CoADocuments/OPStandardsGuidelines2017.pdf (Appendix B). This is a key document to review and compare to curriculum published by other professions. It can be used as a reasonable gauge to determine the degree to which other professions train their graduates in comprehensive O&P care.

O&P Educational Programs

The name, location, and website of each educational institution that currently offers a master of science in orthotics and prosthetics (MSOP) degree is below. Individual websites may be accessed to gain further details on programs and coursework required for O&P-specific training.

Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama

www.alasu.edu

Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas

www.bcm.edu

California State University Dominguez Hills, Long Beach, California

www.csudh.edu

Concordia University/Century College, St. Paul, Minnesota

www.csp.edu

Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

www.emich.edu

Florida International University / International Institute of Orthotics & Prosthetics, Tampa, Florida

iifoandp.org

Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia

graduate.kennesaw.edu

Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois

www.nupoc.northwestern.edu

University of Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut

www.hartford.edu



University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
www.shrs.pitt.edu

University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, Texas
www.utsouthwestern.edu

University of Washington, Seattle, Washington
www.rehab.washington.edu

Residency Requirements

NCOPE requires students to complete a residency either after graduating from an O&P master's degree program or as a part of their accredited educational program (e.g. Baylor College of Medicine). Residency standards have been adopted and are required of residency sites at clinical O&P patient care centers across the United States. The residency program is an extension of the skills and knowledge learned in the academic program and is designed to translate that knowledge into guided clinical training in direct patient care. A complete explanation can be found at the following link: <https://ncope.org/index.php/home-page-v2/residency-and-professional-experiences/orthotic-prosthetic-residency-standards/>

Certification Examination

The American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics, and Pedorthics, Inc. (ABC) www.abcop.org has the sole responsibility for the examination and certification of eligible candidates. An ABC-certified orthotist and/or prosthetist is a healthcare professional who is specifically educated and trained in the provision of orthoses and prostheses as a component of managing comprehensive orthotic and/or prosthetic patient care. ABC-certified practitioners can independently provide or supervise the provision of orthotic and/or prosthetic patient care. The examination process is as follows:

Written Exam

The three-hour, 165-question multiple-choice exam assesses a candidate's knowledge of patient and practice management. Knowledge assessed on the written exam includes anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, kinesiology, disease process, pathologies, material science, ethics, and professionalism.



Written Simulation Exam

The three-hour interactive exam uses seven simulated case scenarios to test a candidate's analytic and clinical problem-solving skills. The cases include patient assessment, prescription criteria, device recommendation, technical implementation, and follow-up protocols.

Clinical Patient Management (CPM) Exam

There are three hands-on practical assessments of a candidate's knowledge and skills through direct examiner and patient-model interaction in a clinical environment. Candidates perform specific tasks while demonstrating and describing the orthotic or prosthetic recommendation, fitting criteria, patient instructions, and problem-solving involved in the provision of care.

A comprehensive guide of the certification process can be accessed on the ABC website:

https://www.abcop.org/docs/default-source/publications/practitioner-candidate-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=da25c10c_1

Continuing Education Requirements

There is a professional obligation to stay abreast of clinical and technological developments. Continuing education is required to maintain certified status and remain in good standing with ABC. The minimum requirement based on single discipline or dual discipline practitioners is 75 or 100 credit hours per five-year period.

A detailed description of the continuing education process and requirements can be found on the ABC website: https://www.abcop.org/docs/default-source/publications/guide-to-maintaining-your-certification.pdf?sfvrsn=c3fa5cc_6

The American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists (the Academy) website (www.oandp.org) is an excellent resource for orthotic and prosthetic professionals. The Academy website has more than 400 credit-earning courses available and provides access to the latest journals and other literature, including research materials and instructions for those wishing to conduct research or publish works contributing to the science of O&P.

In addition to the professional organizations listed above, which are involved in the O&P professional's education, residence, or continuing education, the following organizations are directly associated with many aspects of orthotic and prosthetic patient care and consumer advocacy.



[The American Academy of Orthotists and Prosthetists \(the Academy\)](#)

In addition to being the primary source for the continuing education orthotists and prosthetists need to maintain their certification, the Academy also represents the interests of individual O&P professionals.

[The Amputee Coalition \(AC\)](#)

The AC empowers people affected by limb loss to achieve their full potential through education, support, and advocacy. The AC also promotes limb-loss prevention.

[The American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association \(AOPA\)](#)

AOPA represents the business interests of O&P facilities and manufacturers. [The Association of Children's Prosthetic-Orthotic Clinics \(ACPOC\)](#)

ACPOC is an association of professionals who are involved in clinics that provide O&P care to children with limb loss or orthopedic disabilities.

[Board for Certification/Accreditation, International \(BOC\)](#)

BOC certifies pedorthists and fitters and is involved with facility accreditation.

[The Center for Orthotics and Prosthetics Learning and Outcomes/Evidence-Based Practice \(COPL\)](#)

COPL is dedicated to advancing the development of and learning about outcomes and evidence-based research projects in the O&P profession.

[The International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics \(ISPO\)](#) ISPO focuses on O&P practice throughout the world.

[Mobility Saves](#)

Mobility Saves presents research to affirm that O&P services save money for payers and help patients preserve or regain mobility.

[National Association for the Advancement of Orthotics and Prosthetics \(NAAOP\)](#)

NAAOP educates the public and promotes public policy that is in the interest of the O&P professionals and the patients they serve.



[The Orthotic and Prosthetic Education and Research Foundation \(OPERF\)](#)

OPERF awards grants and prizes to O&P researchers and students to promote excellence in patient care.

[Pedorthic Footcare Association \(PFA\)](#)

PFA represents the interests of the credentialed pedorthist and supports the pedorthic profession at large.