

What can I do with a degree in...

RECREATIONAL THERAPY

What is RECREATIONAL THERAPY?

Recreational Therapy (RTH) is, “...a treatment service designed to restore, remediate and rehabilitate a person’s level of functioning and independence in life activities, to promote health and wellness as well as reduce or eliminate the activity limitations and restrictions to participation in life situations caused by an illness or disabling condition” (American Therapeutic Recreation Association).

Recreational Therapy students learn how to use active treatment interventions to help people recover or strengthen physical and cognitive abilities; reduce depression, stress and anxiety; build confidence; or interact socially. Treatment interventions may include areas such as leisure education, horticulture, community integration, adventure, creative and expressive arts, and HeartMath.

WCU was the first accredited university in the country to offer a Bachelor of Science degree specifically in recreational therapy, and was the first to obtain CAAHEP accreditation through the Committee on Accreditation of Recreational Therapy Education Programs.

What are the **DEGREE** **OPTIONS?**

**Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in
Recreational Therapy**

What is the **ADMISSION** **PROCESS?**

Full admission information can be found on the [RT website](#), or by contacting the Program Director. Applications are accepted by Sept. 15 each Fall semester. Applicants are required



to be accepted at Western Carolina University and be pre-recreational therapy majors before the application deadline. They must have completed, or be currently taking, RTH 200: Foundations of Recreational Therapy and BIOL 291: Anatomy and Physiology I. A GPA of 2.5 is required to apply; students are also required to have experience working with individuals with disabilities. Involvement in the student Recreational Therapy Association (RTA) is highly valued. After an initial review of applications, RTH faculty will conduct small group interviews with finalists to make decisions about the final candidates for the major.

What is the **CREDENTIALING** **PROCESS?**

To become credentialed as a recreational therapist, students must complete the major coursework, a 15-week, 600-hour internship under an appropriately credentialed recreational therapist, and pass a national certification exam. These steps

prepare the student for application to be a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist through the [National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification](#) and to be a licensed recreational therapist in the state of North Carolina through the [North Carolina Board of Recreational Therapy Licensure](#).

Who employs **RECREATIONAL** **THERAPY** graduates?

Common settings for new graduates include psychiatric hospitals for adolescents and adults; care facilities for older adults including areas such as assisted living and memory care; and a wide variety of services for persons with cognitive, physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities at hospitals and treatment centers throughout the region and across the nation. Some graduates choose to pursue graduate education in recreational therapy or other allied fields.

MAJOR MAP

How to use this map: Review the four categories and suggestions of activities and when you should consider engaging in them. Remember, these are just suggestions! There is a fillable space for you to add in any other ideas you have to set yourself up for success in life after college.

1st YEAR

2nd YEAR

EXCEL IN ACADEMICS

First-year students should focus on liberal studies coursework that will lay the foundation for success. The RTH [8-semester plan](#) will have courses that work well for the major and potential future graduate work. Make sure to meet with your advisor on Advising Day and beyond.

Second-year students will continue enrolling in liberal studies courses. **Students must enroll in RTH 200: Foundations of Recreational Therapy and BIOL 291: Human Anatomy and Physiology I (with lab) in the Fall semester.** These courses are required before applying for the program in September. If admitted, students will take the first two RTH cohort courses in the Spring semester. Check out the [8-semester plan](#) with your advisor.

GET HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

Focus your hands-on experiences on working with individuals with disabilities prior to applying for the RTH Program in your sophomore year (e.g.: Working with WCU's UP Program). Learn about opportunities through the student Recreational Therapy Association (RTA) and by meeting with your RT faculty.

Continued volunteer work is expected throughout the second year. Many summer jobs are available with persons with disabilities. It is highly recommended that students have these experiences to build context for third-year coursework and for resume development.

Check out WCU's [Degree Plus program](#) and choose which events in any of the four categories you'd like to attend: Professionalism, Teamwork, Leadership, or Cultural Responsiveness.

As you are admitted to the recreational therapy major, you will be required to complete an onboarding process. Your advisor will explain these requirements in depth during advising in October.

BE PART OF THE COMMUNITY

Students are highly encouraged to be active in the student Recreational Therapy Association. [Join RTA through WCU Engage](#) to get all of the latest meeting and event information.

In addition to being active in RTA, consider joining the North Carolina Recreational Therapy Association.

Connect with the [Center for Service Learning](#) and ask about the [Lily Award](#), a program aimed to encourage students to be connected with their community.

Students may also attend several conferences in the Spring semester: Student and Professional Issues Forum (SPIF) through the [North Carolina Recreational Therapy Association](#); Judith E. Voelkl Memorial Recreational Therapy Workshop through Clemson University; and the [Southeast Recreational Therapy Symposium](#) (scholarships available)

PREPARE FOR LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

Further explore your career options or career interests using the [Center for Career and Professional Development's](#) online resources, [Focus 2](#), and [Onet Online](#).

Check out [CCPD's list of career-building activities](#) and participate in an activity this year, such as attending Career Fair Plus.

Don't hesitate to begin applying for professional opportunities. It's important to build a list of experiences with individuals with disabilities, as well as leadership skills and professional certifications.

Start keeping track of all of your involvement. Your advisor will have a template that will help you to track your volunteer/ work experiences, conferences, and more.

Looking for a minor? Consider these options:

Communication Sciences and Disorders
Leadership
Inclusive Education

Parks and Recreation Management
Psychology
Social Work
Spanish

3rd YEAR

Third-year courses focus solely on recreational therapy and required support courses for credentialing. Check out the [8-semester plan](#) with your advisor.

In addition to the service learning labs in which students participate, you should consider continued involvement in work and volunteer responsibilities.

Consider running for office in RTA, or taking on other related leadership experience.

Continue involvement in RTA, and attend the [North Carolina Recreational Therapy Association Annual Conference](#) in the Fall. Check out the [Past President's Conference Scholarship](#) as well.

Consider becoming member of the [American Therapeutic Recreation Association](#).

Connect with alumni in your field through [LinkedIn](#)

Begin professional preparation including writing resumes, cover letters, and practice interviewing as part of your junior coursework. Students will begin to prepare applications for senior internship sites with guidance from faculty.

Utilize the [Writing and Learning Commons](#) for GRE exam preparation sessions. Use [Big Interview](#) to learn more about professional interviews.

4th YEAR

In the Fall of the fourth year, students will enroll in a combination of final major coursework and electives. Students will have applied for internships at this time and will make decisions regarding internship options. In the Spring, students will enroll solely in the clinical internship experience course. Review the [8-semester plan](#) with your advisor and remember to [apply for graduation](#).

The senior internship in the Spring semester is a 15-week, 600-hour on-site clinical experience with a credentialed recreational therapist. This is a mandatory part of the program's education and credentialing expectations.

Students in their final year are expected to attend the [North Carolina Recreational Therapy Association Conference](#) in the Fall semester.

Additionally, students should consider attending the [American Therapeutic Recreation Association Annual Conference](#). Scholarships such as the [Peg Connolly Scholarship](#) can help pay for conference expenses.

Students in their final year will create accounts for certification and licensure and begin the application process.

For those wishing to attend graduate school, applications should be completed in the Fall. Internship should be secured and certification exam dates set for the Spring semester. Be sure to polish your resume, cover letter/ personal statement, and interview skills by using the [CCPD](#).

Internships are still the number-one educational experience employers look for in a recent college graduate resume. (Chronicle of Higher Education's study on 59,000 employers)

DID YOU KNOW?

MORE INFORMATION

INTERNSHIP Information

As part of the Recreational Therapy curriculum, students must complete a 15-week, 600-hour internship in the Spring semester of the senior year; this experience allows students the opportunity to apply the knowledge that they have gained from the classroom into a professional setting. WCU's Recreational Therapy Program is allied with various agencies across the country, allowing students to choose a unique learning experience. Our current list of contracts is constantly evolving each semester to meet the needs and interests of our students.

SKILLS LEARNED in the classroom

The core competencies will center on developing skills such as:

- Applying the principles of the RT process in individual and group treatment programs
- Applying techniques of evidence-based practice
- Assessing Individualized patient/ client
- Planning treatment/ programs
- Implementing treatment/ programs
- Utilizing specific modality skills and facilitation techniques used as treatment interventions
- Evaluating treatment/ programs
- Managing recreational therapy practice

Program MISSION & VISION

Vision: To be leaders in innovative, progressive recreational therapy education that positively impacts the lives of people with disabilities through the use of recreational therapy.

Mission: The mission of the Recreational Therapy Program is to cultivate students who have the knowledge, skills and abilities to become exceptional recreational therapy practitioners.

Professional RESOURCES

- American Therapeutic Recreation Association: www.atra-online.com
- North Carolina Recreation Therapy Association: www.ncrta.org
- National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification: www.nctrc.org/
- North Carolina Board for Recreational Therapy Licensure: ncbrtl.org

QUESTIONS?

For questions, please visit the School of Health Sciences Student Services Center at ssc.wcu.edu or visit the Recreational Therapy Program website at rt.wcu.edu.

To schedule an appointment with a career counselor, contact the Center for Career and Professional Development, 828-227-7133 or careerservices@wcu.edu.

