

Doctor of Physical Therapy, DPT

The Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) is the entry-level professional degree for physical therapists. Based on the number of outstanding applicants, approximately 50 students are annually enrolled in the DPT program.

Technical Standards

Physical therapy is a profession that requires physical, mental, and emotional fitness. In the program, students obtain the foundation of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary for a successful career as a physical therapist. Technical standards reflect the abilities that a physical therapist must possess for safe and effective clinical practice. Prospective and current students must meet the following technical standards.

General Abilities

Students are expected to possess the intellectual ability to learn, integrate, analyze, and synthesize data. They must have functional use of the senses of vision, hearing, and smell, as well as unimpaired equilibrium. Their exteroceptive senses (touch, movement, stereognosis, and vibratory) must be sufficiently intact to perform the activities required for a complete physical therapy education. Students must have motor function capabilities, physical endurance, and the emotional health to meet the demands of entry-level physical therapy education and the demands of total patient care, which may include extended hours of instruction and time in clinic (evenings, nights, and weekends). Students must be capable of punctual, consistent, and reliable attendance in the didactic and clinical education component of the curriculum.

Observation

The ability to observe is required for demonstrations, visual presentations in lectures, and laboratories. Observation requires the functional use of vision, hearing, smell, somatic sensations, and the use of common sense. Students must be able to observe patients accurately and completely, both at a distance and up close, attending to both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Communication

Students must be able to speak and listen to patients in order to elicit information, perceive nonverbal communication, describe changes in mood, communicate effectively and sensitively with patients and their families, as well as instruct patients and their families. Communication in oral, written, and electronic form with the health care team must be effective, efficient, and timely.

Motor/Psychomotor Function

Students are required to have sufficient motor function to ascertain information from patients by auscultation, percussion, palpation, and movement facilitation. Intervention methods may include exercising, lifting, transferring of patients, and assisting during ambulation. These methods must be completed in a manner that assures the safety of a patient as well as the safety of the student. Students must have motor function sufficient to perform the movements required to provide both nonurgent and emergent treatment.

Such skills require coordination of gross and fine muscular movements, equilibrium, sensation, and muscle strength.

Intellectual—Conceptual, Integrative, and Qualitative Abilities

Problem solving is a critical skill demanded of physical therapists and requires conceptual, integrative, and qualitative thinking abilities. Students must be able to synthesize knowledge and integrate the relevant aspects of a patient's history, laboratory results, and physical examination to provide an explanation for intervention by recalling and retaining information in an efficient and timely manner. They must have the ability to incorporate new information from peers, teachers, and research to formulate intervention plans. Students must be able to comprehend three-dimensional relationships and the spatial and functional relationships of structures and analyze and apply this information for problem-solving and decision-making purposes. They must be able to organize, prioritize, analyze, and evaluate detailed and complex information individually, in small groups, and in clinical settings, and do so within a limited time frame.

Behavioral/Interpersonal Skills/ Professionalism

It is necessary that students have the emotional health to maximize their intellectual ability, exercise good judgment, and complete all responsibilities required for the evaluation and treatment of patients. They must be able to self-assess, accept criticism, and assume responsibility for maintaining professional behavior. Students must be able to develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients, families, caregivers, and colleagues. They must be able to tolerate physical and emotional stress and continue to function effectively. Students must possess qualities of adaptability and flexibility and be able to function in an atmosphere of uncertainty. They must be motivated to serve and demonstrate a high level of compassion for others. Students are required to demonstrate integrity and act in a manner that demonstrates consciousness of the profession's core values. They must possess sufficient interpersonal skills to interact positively with people from all levels of society, ethnic backgrounds, and belief systems.

Learning Outcomes

Graduates will be prepared to:

- examine, evaluate, treat, and prevent impairments, functional limitations, and disabilities;
- maintain and promote fitness, health, and quality of life; and
- ensure availability, accessibility, and excellence in the delivery of physical therapy services to patients/clients.

As essential participants in the health care delivery system, graduates will be:

- prepared to assume leadership roles in prevention and health maintenance programs, in the provision of rehabilitation services, and in professional and community organizations; and
- able to play important roles in developing health policy and appropriate standards as well as assessing clinical outcomes for the various elements of physical therapy practice.