



University of Pittsburgh – Department of Physical Therapy

Technical Standards

To acquire requisite knowledge and skills to practice as a physical therapist, graduate students must be able to function in a broad variety of clinical situations and provide a wide spectrum of patient care. Students must possess certain skills and abilities to successfully complete both the didactic and clinical components of the curriculum with or without reasonable accommodations, regardless of disability status. All graduates must be able to perform tasks such as: taking a case history, performing examination tests and measures, completing an evaluation, and performing manual interventions. They must also be able to synthesize these findings into a physical therapy diagnosis and plan of treatment.

These skills and abilities are divided into five areas: *communication, motor, intellectual-cognitive, sensory-observational and behavioral-social*. Students must be able to undertake all academic (clinical and didactic requirements) to the satisfaction of faculty to become competent and reliable practitioners. To this end, the Faculty of the Department of Physical Therapy has established criteria (Technical Standards) that students must possess in order to enroll in, and to continue in academic courses and clinical placements required for the DPT degree.

General Guidelines

The Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree is typically a three-year program that requires the acquisition of professional attitudes, skills and behavior as well as the accumulation of scientific knowledge. The DPT degree certifies that the student has acquired the broad base of knowledge and skills required for the practice of physical therapy and is eligible to take the professional licensing examination. These standards are rigorous and exacting so admission can be offered only to those individuals best-qualified to meet the performance standards of the profession.

Acceptance to the DPT program is offered to those who present the highest qualifications for the study and practice of physical therapy. Graduates of the program must have the knowledge and skills to function in a variety of clinical situations and to render a wide spectrum of patient care. Candidates for the DPT degree must have somatic sensation and the functional use of the necessary senses. Skills will be lessened if the student does not have functional use of the sense of balance and sufficient motor function to permit them to carry out the activities described in the sections that follow. They must be able to consistently, quickly and accurately integrate all information received by whatever sense(s) are employed, and they must have the intellectual ability to learn, integrate, analyze and synthesize data.

Candidates for the DPT degree must have abilities and skills in the five areas outlined below.

Communication. A student must possess adequate communication skills to:

- Communicate effectively and proficiently in oral and written English
 - English language skills must be at a level that can be easily understood by clients and colleagues for general interactions, for administration of tests and implementation of treatment as judged by a panel of PT faculty.
- Read and write to meet didactic and clinical demands
- Demonstrate and perceive non-verbal communication with patients that is appropriate for culture and context
- Communicate with patients, families, peers and colleagues at an appropriate and professional level
- Clearly record examination results, treatment observations and treatment plans in a reasonable amount of time
- Accurately convey information with relevance and cultural sensitivity
- Effectively receive and send verbal communication in emergency situations
- Recognize and promptly respond to the patient's emotional communications such as sadness, worry, agitation, pain and lack of comprehension of therapist communication



University of Pittsburgh – Department of Physical Therapy

Motor. A student must possess adequate motor skills to:

- Sustain the necessary physical activity level required in classroom and clinical activities
- Respond quickly in the event of an emergency situation to provide patients a safe environment
- Access transportation to clinical and didactic placement sites
- Prepare the clinical environment without compromising best practice guidelines
- Assume and maintain a variety of body postures (e.g. sitting, standing, walking, bending, squatting, kneeling, stair climbing, reaching forward, reaching overhead, turning and movement of the trunk and neck in all directions) so as to sufficiently perform patient examination and intervention procedures
- Demonstrate appropriate psychomotor skills for performing tests and measures for patient examination
- Execute appropriate psychomotor movements required for manual handling and manipulation of various object/person sizes and weights including lifting and transferring patients, guarding patients during gait training on level surfaces/uneven surfaces/ramps/stairs, pushing and pulling to provide resistance and to assist in maneuvering patients. Students may be required to:
 - Safely lift up to 50 lbs independently
 - Safely lift up to 200 lbs with assistance
 - Safely push and pull up to 200 lbs
- Balance self and provide support and balance to patients on a variety of surfaces including level and uneven ground, ramps, curbs, and stairs
- Have sufficient endurance to effectively manage patient care
- Access technology for clinical and didactic requirements
- Complete an episode of care within a reasonable time frame to effectively manage the patient

Sensory/Observational. A student must possess adequate sensory skills to:

- Effectively observe and function (in visual and auditory modalities) in both clinical and didactic settings
- Record and evaluate physical status as well as verbal and non-verbal responses to sensory stimuli
- Visually assess treatment equipment, goniometric measures, normal/abnormal color changes and integrity of the skin, pupillary changes, postures, and normal/abnormal movement patterns
- Perform effective auscultation/auditory evaluation inclusive of but not limited to: lungs, heart, apical pulse, blood pressure, joint noises, prostheses
- Listen for environmental cues inclusive of but not limited to: phones, overhead paging systems, alarms, verbal communication in a setting with competing ambient noise
- Provide appropriate tactile feedback related to safe application of gradient pressures during examination and intervention (including but not limited to: palpation, manual muscle testing, joint mobility, percussion, massage)

Intellectual/Cognitive. A student must possess adequate intellectual and cognitive skills to:

- Comprehend, retain, assimilate, analyze, synthesize, integrate concepts and problem solve
- Formulate written and verbal assessments and therapeutic judgments to meet didactic and clinical demands in a reasonable time frame
- Identify and communicate the limits of their own knowledge and skills
- Utilize resources to increase their own base of knowledge and skills
- Comprehend three-dimensional relationships, the spatial and functional relationships of structures and to analyze and apply this information for problem solving and decision-making.
- Comprehend text, numbers and graphs
- Gather, appraise, and evaluate patient information collected during past history, examinations, and throughout patient/client management to formulate hypotheses and make clinical decisions (diagnoses, prognoses, and plans of care).



University of Pittsburgh – Department of Physical Therapy

Behavioral/Social. A student must possess:

- Appropriate interpersonal skills and the demeanor and rapport necessary for quality patient care
- The capacity to maintain composure and continue to function well during periods of high stress
- The perseverance, diligence and commitment to complete professional program requirements
- The flexibility and the ability to adjust to the changing situations and uncertainty inherent in clinical situations
- The ability to critically evaluate his or her own performance and identify tactics to improve performance, both with and independent of faculty assistance
- Compassion, integrity and empathy for others
- The ability to reason morally and practice physical therapy in an ethical manner
- The ability to demonstrate appropriate assertiveness, delegate responsibilities, and function as part of a physical therapy team
- The ability to show respect for individuals with disabilities and those of differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, races, religions and/or sexual orientations

Candidates for graduate degrees in the Department of Physical Therapy are required to meet the above technical standards, with or without reasonable accommodation, regardless of disability. Disability self-identification is voluntary and confidential. The University of Pittsburgh offers reasonable accommodation for qualified, eligible students with disabilities. Please contact our Disability Resources and Services (412-648-7890) for information regarding documentation guidelines.