

## PHYSICAL THERAPY (D.P.T.) ACADEMIC AND CAREER INFORMATION

### NATURE OF THE WORK, EARNINGS, AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

Physical therapists are evidence-based healthcare professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. They offer cost-effective treatment that improves mobility and relieves pain, reduces the need for surgery and prescription drugs, and allows patients to participate in a recovery plan designed for their specific needs. In addition, physical therapist work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles. Physical therapists provide care for people in a variety of settings, including hospitals, private practices, outpatient clinics, home health agencies, schools, sports and fitness facilities, work settings, and nursing homes. State licensure is required in each state in which a physical therapist practices. The 2016 median pay for physical therapist was \$85,400. Employment of physical therapists is projected to grow 34 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for physical therapy services will come from the aging baby boomers, who are staying active later in life. In addition, physical therapists will be needed to treat people with mobility issues stemming from chronic conditions, such as diabetes or obesity (Occupational Outlook, 2016).

18,475 applicants applied via the Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS) during the 2015-2016 admissions cycle. Of the individual applicants who applied via PTCAS with verified application status, 9,227 applicants received one or more offers of acceptance from a participating program. The average GPA of applicants was **3.40** while the average GPA of accepted students was **3.59**.

### PHYSICAL THERAPY SCHOOL

Physical therapist education programs in the United States only offer the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree to all new students who enroll. The length of professional DPT programs is typically 3 years. Primary content areas in the curriculum may include, but are not limited to, biology/anatomy, cellular histology, physiology, exercise physiology, biomechanics, kinesiology, neuroscience, pharmacology, pathology, behavioral sciences, communication, ethics/values, management sciences, finance, sociology, clinical reasoning, evidence-based practice, cardiovascular and pulmonary, endocrine and metabolic, and musculoskeletal. Eighty percent (80%) of the DPT curriculum comprises classroom (didactic) and lab study and the remaining 20 percent (20%) is dedicated to clinical education. PT students spend on average 27.5 weeks in their final clinical experience. Licensed physical therapists may choose to pursue a residency or fellowship program to enhance their knowledge and practice. Physical therapists have the opportunity to become board-certified clinical specialists but it is not required.

### ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Due to the competitive nature of the Physical therapy school application process and rigorous training required, students should *carefully consider their motivation and preparation for this career*. Physical therapy schools are looking for an academic record that indicates the aptitude and knowledge base needed to successfully complete the Physical therapy school curriculum.

**There is no preferred major** to be eligible for admission to a DPT program. The most common undergraduate majors among accepted applicants include exercise science, biology, kinesiology, and psychology. In selecting a college major, students should consider how they will satisfactorily complete the prerequisite courses for the designated physical therapist programs in addition to the college/university's degree and major requirements.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

DPT programs require prerequisite science courses to be completed at a university/college within the 5-10 years prior to enrollment. Students should be prepared to identify the classes completed or planned that will fulfill the program's course requirements. Some programs only accept anatomy or physiology courses completed in a biology, neuroscience, anatomy, or integrated physiology department. Programs may not accept a combined anatomy and physiology (A&P) course or those completed in other departments, such as kinesiology.

**CSULB courses which fulfill admission requirements for most U.S. Physical Therapy programs:**

Coursework	CSULB Courses	Units
One year of General Chemistry with Lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B	5, 5
Human Anatomy and Physiology with Lab	Biology 208: Human Anatomy Biology 207: Human Physiology	4, 4
One year of General Biology with Lab	Biology 211 & 212	4, 4
One year of General Physics with Lab	Physics 100A & 100B OR 151 & 152	4, 4
One course in Statistics	Biology 260 OR Kinesiology 483	3
General Psychology	Psychology 100	3, 3

## IMPORTANT FACTORS CONSIDERED FOR SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Many programs require applicants to have volunteer or paid experiences working with patients under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist. The program may specify the settings and types of experiences required. Applicants may also be required to have a licensed physical therapist verify the hours. This experience may be an important factor in the admissions process. Students should respectfully contact physical therapy clinics, hospitals, long-term care facilities (e.g., nursing homes), and other healthcare settings in the area to find observation opportunities. See also the [Physical Therapist Observation Hours](#).

Many programs require 1-4 letters of recommendation as part of the admissions process. Programs may require references from a particular individual, such as a physical therapist, science professor, or academic advisor. If references are required, select individuals who meet the program's requirements, know the student well, and can speak to maturity, dependability, dedication, compassion, communication skills, leadership, and any hands on experience in the field. See also [Reference Requirements](#) by Program.

Most programs require the [Graduate Record Examination \(GRE\)](#) for admission and have established a PTCAS GRE Code for the reporting of scores.

[Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service \(PTCAS\)](#). Application opens early July. Application can be submitted: July -May. The cost is \$145 to apply to one program and \$45 for each additional program. There is also a fee waivers that is available to a limited amount of eligible students. Waivers are granted to financially disadvantaged applicants on a first-come, first-serve basis. PTCAS will decide if applicants qualify for a fee waiver based on their income, or their parent's income.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [APTA Information for Prospective Students](#)
- [Move Forward: Physical Therapy Brings Motion to Life](#)
- [Why I Chose a Career in Physical Therapy](#)

For more information on Physical Therapy, visit [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org) and see your HPAO advisor for further information on the application process, application assistance, and a list of upcoming workshops and events.