

TECHNICAL STANDARDS
College of Health Sciences
School of Physical Therapy & Athletic Training

These technical standards describe essential functions needed to complete the educational program and perform the job of a physical therapist. An individual not possessing one or more of these capabilities will not be admitted to the program unless reasonable accommodations can be made that allow the person to perform all required tasks within a standard period of time used in the profession. Applicants are not required to disclose the nature of a disability(ies) to the Admissions Committee; however, any applicant with questions about these technical requirements is encouraged to discuss their concerns with the University's Office of Educational Accessibility (757) 683-4655. Deficiencies in knowledge, skill, judgment, integrity, character, professional attitude or demeanor which may jeopardize patient care and/or safety may be grounds for course/internship failure and possible dismissal from the Program.

Applicants/Students admitted to the DPT program must possess aptitudes, abilities, and skills in the following five areas:

1. Observation

Students must be able to observe and identify anatomic structures and be able to visually distinguish different tissues in a limited time period. A student must be able to observe a patient accurately at a distance and close at hand, noting nonverbal as well as verbal signals. Specific vision-related requirements include, but are not limited to the following abilities: skin integrity; visualizing and discriminating findings on x-rays and other imaging tests; reading written and illustrated material; observing demonstrations in the classroom, including projected slides and overheads; observing and differentiating changes in body movement; observing anatomic structures; discriminating numbers and patterns associated with diagnostic instruments and tests, such as sphygmomanometers and electrocardiograms, and using instruments competently, such as stethoscope, monofilaments, etc.

2. Communication

Students must be able to relate effectively and sensitively with peers, patients/clients and faculty. A student must be able to communicate clearly with and observe patients in order to elicit information, describe accurately changes in mood, activity and posture, and perceive verbal as well as nonverbal communications. Communication includes not only speech but also reading and writing. Physical Therapy education presents exceptional challenges in the volume and breadth of required reading and the necessity to impart information to others. Students must be able to communicate quickly, effectively and efficiently in oral and written English with all members of the health care team. Specific requirements include but are not limited to the following abilities: communicating rapidly and clearly with the medical team on rounds; eliciting a thorough history from patients; and communicating complex findings in appropriate terms to patients and to various members of the health care team (fellow students, physicians, nurses, aides, therapists, social workers, and others). Students must learn to recognize and respond promptly and appropriately to emotional communications such as sadness, worry, agitation, and lack of comprehension. Each student must be able to read and to record observations and plans legibly, efficiently and accurately in documents such as the patient record. Students must be able

to prepare and communicate concise but complete summaries of individual encounters. Students must be able to complete forms according to directions in a complete and timely fashion.

3. Sensory and Motor Coordination or Function

Students must have sufficient sensory function to palpate (touch/feel) pulses and body tissues, feel resistance to movement, discern hot and cold, and auscultate (listen) lungs and heart. A student must have adequate gross motor function (movement, strength, balance and coordination) to perform such tasks as cardiopulmonary resuscitation, lifting people's limbs, assistance with transfers and gait, moving and positioning patients. A student must have adequate fine motor function to manipulate instruments such as a sphygmomanometer, goniometer, and therapeutic modality equipment. Students must be able to respond promptly to urgencies within the hospital or clinic, and must not hinder the ability of co-workers to provide prompt care.

4. Intellectual-Conceptual Integrative and Quantitative Abilities

These abilities include measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, judgment, numerical recognition and synthesis. Problem solving, a critical skill demanded of physical therapists, requires all of these intellectual abilities, and must be performed quickly, especially in emergency situations. Students must be able to identify significant findings from history, physical examination, and laboratory data and graphs, provide a reasoned explanation for likely therapy, recalling and retaining information in an efficient and timely manner. The ability to incorporate new information from peers, teachers, and the medical literature in formulating treatment and plans is essential. Good judgment in patient assessment, diagnostic and therapeutic planning is essential; students must be able to identify and communicate the limits of their knowledge to others when appropriate.

5. Behavioral Attributes

Empathy, integrity, honesty, concern for others, good interpersonal skills, interest and motivation are all personal qualities that are required. Students must possess the emotional health required for full use of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt completion of all responsibilities, and the development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with peers, patients/clients and faculty. At times, this requires the ability to be aware of and appropriately react to one's own immediate emotional responses. For example, students must maintain a professional demeanor and organization in the face of long hours and personal fatigue, dissatisfied patients, and tired colleagues. Students must be able to develop professional relationships with patients, providing comfort and reassurance when appropriate while protecting patient confidentiality. Students must possess adequate endurance to tolerate physically taxing workloads and to function effectively under stress. Students must be able to adapt to changing environments, display flexibility and learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the clinical problems of many patients. Students are expected to accept appropriate suggestions and criticism and if necessary, respond by modification of behavior.