

University of South Dakota

Physical Therapy Department

Essential Functions

Becoming a physical therapist requires the completion of a professional education program that is both intellectually and physically challenging. The purpose of this document is to articulate the demands of this program in a way that will allow matriculated student physical therapists to compare their own capabilities against these demands.

Matriculated students of Physical Therapy are asked about their ability to complete these tasks, with or without reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodation refers to ways in which the university can assist student physical therapists with disabilities to accomplish these tasks (for example, providing extra time to complete an examination or enhancing the sound system in a classroom). Reasonable accommodation does not mean that student physical therapists with disabilities will be exempt from certain tasks; it does mean that we will work with student physical therapists with disabilities to determine whether there are ways that we can assist the student of physical therapy toward completion of the tasks.

Students of Physical Therapy who indicate that they can complete these tasks, with or without reasonable accommodation, are not required to disclose the specifics of their disabilities prior to an admission decision. Student physical therapists who cannot complete these tasks with or without accommodation are ineligible for consideration for admission. Once admitted, a student of Physical Therapy with a disability who wishes reasonable accommodation must request it through the Office of Disabilities. An offer of admission may be withdrawn if it becomes apparent that the student physical therapist cannot complete essential tasks even with accommodation, which the accommodations needed are not reasonable and would cause undue hardship to the institution, or that fulfilling the functions would create a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of others.

Students of Physical Therapy who have questions about this document or who would like to discuss specific accommodations should make an initial inquiry with the Chairperson of the Department of Physical Therapy, who will route the request to the Office of Disability Services.

Essential Tasks

- ❑ Student physical therapists must meet class standards for course completion throughout the curriculum.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must be able to read, write, speak, and understand English at a level consistent with successful course completion and development of positive patient-therapist relationships.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must complete readings, assignments, and other activities outside of class hours.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must gather decision-making pieces of information during patient assessment activities in class or in the clinical setting without the use of an intermediary such as a classmate, a physical therapist assistant, or an aide.
- ❑ Student physical therapists may perform treatment activities in class or in the clinical setting by direct performance or by instruction and supervision of intermediaries.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must apply critical thinking processes to their work in the classroom and the clinic, must exercise sound judgment in class and in the clinic, and must follow safety procedures established for each class and clinic.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must have interpersonal skills as needed for productive classroom discussion, respectful interaction with classmates and faculty, and development of appropriate therapist-patient relationships.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must maintain personal appearance and hygiene conducive to classroom and clinical settings.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must pass a cardiopulmonary resuscitation course at the health professional level.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must demonstrate appropriate health status prior to enrollment, with annual updates on some items: no active tuberculosis; rubella (German measles) and rubeola (measles)

- immunity, tetanus-diphtheria booster within 10 years of anticipated graduation, and hepatitis B vaccine series or written declination.
- ❑ Student physical therapists must complete OSHA-regulated Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Training.
 - ❑ Student physical therapists must follow standards and policies specified in the Student Handbook, the Letter of Agreement (contract between university and clinical sites), and the Clinical Education Handbook. The most recent copies of these documents are available for review.

Typical Skills Used to Complete These Essential Tasks

- ❑ Students of Physical Therapy typically attend classes 30 or more hours per week during each academic semester. Classes consist of a combination of lecture, discussion, laboratory, and clinical activities. When on clinical rotation, student physical therapists are typically present at the clinic 40 or more hours per week on a schedule that corresponds to the operating hours of the clinic.
- ❑ Student physical therapists typically sit for two to 10 hours daily, stand for one to two hours daily, and walk or travel for two hours daily.
- ❑ Student physical therapists typically relocate outside of the Vermillion area to complete one or more clinical rotations of four to sixteen weeks, duration each.
- ❑ Student physical therapists frequently lift less than 10 pounds and occasionally lift weights between 10 and 100 pounds.
- ❑ Student physical therapists occasionally carry up to 25 pounds while walking up to 50 feet.
- ❑ Student physical therapists frequently exert 75 pounds of push/pull forces to objects up to 50 feet and occasionally exert 150 pounds of push/pull forces for this distance.
- ❑ Student physical therapists frequently twist, bend, and stoop.
- ❑ Student physical therapists occasionally squat, crawl, climb stools, reach above shoulder level, and kneel.
- ❑ Student physical therapists frequently move from place to place and position to position and must do so at a speed that permits safe handling of classmates and patients.
- ❑ Student physical therapists frequently stand and walk while providing support to a classmate simulating a disability or while supporting a patient with a disability.
- ❑ Student physical therapists occasionally climb stairs or negotiate uneven terrain.
- ❑ Student physical therapists repetitively use their hands with a simple grasp and frequently use a firm grasp and manual dexterity skills.
- ❑ Student physical therapists frequently coordinate verbal and manual activities with gross motor activities.
- ❑ Student physical therapists use auditory, tactile, and visual senses to receive classroom instruction and to evaluate and treat patients.

University of South Dakota

Physical Therapy Department

Technical Standards

The USD Physical Therapy Department promotes the broad preparation of students for clinical practice. Students of Physical Therapy must demonstrate competence in those intellectual, physical, and social tasks that together represent the fundamentals of professional practice. Student physical therapists will be judged not only on their scholastic achievement and ability, but also on their intellectual, physical, and emotional capacities to meet the full requirements of the curriculum. The Admissions Committee has been instructed to exercise judgment on behalf of the faculty to select the entering class, and in so doing, to consider character, extracurricular achievement, and overall suitability for the Physical Therapy profession based upon information in the application, letters of recommendation, and personal interviews.

Our professional accreditation association (CAPTE) requires that the curriculum provides a general professional education, which enables each student of Physical Therapy to deliver entry-level clinical services. This requires the development of a broad array of basic knowledge, skills, and behaviors, appropriate to enabling self-directed learning to further professional development and delivery of competent health care. The basic and applied science component of the curriculum is designed to establish a core of knowledge necessary for clinical training. The clinical curriculum typically includes diverse experiences in ambulatory and inpatient settings. These rotations develop the ability to practice independently, without regard for any future choice of specialty. Each student physical therapist is required by the faculty to pass each required course and clinical rotation in order to graduate.

The following technical standards specify those attributes that the faculty considers necessary for completing the Physical Therapy program and enabling each graduate to subsequently enter clinical practice. These standards describe the essential functions students of Physical Therapy must demonstrate in order to fulfill the requirements of a general professional education and, thus, are prerequisites for entrance, continuation, and graduation. The USD Physical Therapy Department will consider for admission any applicant who demonstrates the ability to perform or to learn to perform the skills specified in this document. Applicants are not required to disclose the nature of any disability (ies) to the Admissions Committee; however, any applicant with questions about these technical requirements is strongly encouraged to discuss the issue with the Office of Disability Services prior to the interview process. If appropriate, and upon the request of the applicant/student of Physical Therapy, reasonable accommodations may be provided.

Certain chronic or recurrent illnesses and problems that interfere with patient care or safety may be incompatible with physical therapy training or clinical practice. Other illnesses may lead to a high likelihood of student physical therapist absenteeism and should be carefully considered. Deficiencies in knowledge, judgment, integrity, character, or professional attitude or demeanor, which may jeopardize patient care may be grounds for course/rotation failure and possible dismissal from the program.

Applicants must possess aptitudes, abilities, and skills in five areas: 1) observation; 2) communication; 3) sensory and motor coordination and function; 4) conceptualization, integration and quantification; and 5) behavioral and social skills, abilities, and aptitude. Each of these standards are described in detail below. Students of Physical Therapy must be able to independently perform the described functions.

Technical Standards for Physical Therapy

1. Observation

Student physical therapists must be able to observe demonstrations and conduct experiments in the basic sciences. A student of Physical Therapy 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 competently using instruments, such as a stethoscope, dynamometer, and goniometer.

2. Communication

Students of Physical Therapy must be able to relate effectively and sensitively with patients, conveying a sense of compassion and empathy. A student physical therapist must be able to clearly communicate with and observe patients in order to elicit information, accurately describe 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 of Physical Therapy 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 compiled 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 of Physical Therapy must learn to recognize and respond promptly to emotional communications such as sadness, worry, agitation, and lack of comprehension of physician communication. Each student physical therapist must be able to read and to record observations and plans legibly, efficiently, and accurately in documents such as the patient record. Student physical therapists must be able to prepare and communicate concise but complete summaries of individual encounters and complex, prolonged encounters, including hospitalizations. Students of Physical Therapy must be able to complete forms according to directions in a complete and timely fashion.

3. Sensory and Motor Coordination or Function

Students of Physical Therapy must have sufficient sensory and motor function to perform a physical examination utilizing palpation, auscultation, percussion, and other diagnostic maneuvers. In general, this requires sufficient exteroceptive sense (touch, pain, and temperature), proprioceptive sense (position, pressure, movement, stereognosis, and vibratory), and motor function. A student physical therapist should be able to execute motor movements required to provide general care and emergency treatment to patients. They 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, measure angles and diameters of various body structures using a tape measure and goniometer, or measure blood pressure and pulse.

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 of Physical Therapy must be able to identify significant findings from history, physical examination, and laboratory data, and then 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 plans is essential. Good judgment in patient assessment, diagnostic and therapeutic planning is essential; student physical therapists must be able to identify and communicate the limits of their knowledge to others when appropriate. Students of Physical Therapy must be able to interpret graphs describing biologic relationships and do other similar modes of data.

5. Behavioral Attributes

Empathy, integrity, honesty, concern for others, good interpersonal skills, interest, and motivation are all personal qualities that are required. Student physical therapists must possess the emotional health required for full use of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, and the prompt completion of all responsibilities attendant to the diagnosis and care of patients. At times, this requires the ability to be aware of and appropriately react to one's own immediate emotional responses. For example, students of Physical Therapy 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 of Physical Therapy must

possess adequate endurance to tolerate physically taxing workloads and to function effectively under stress. All student physical therapists are, at times, required to work for extended periods, occasionally with rotating shifts. Student physical therapists 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 of Physical Therapy are expected to accept appropriate suggestions and criticism and, if necessary, respond by modification of behavior.

If a student requires modifications or accommodation, the student should seek help through the USD Office of Disability Services.

Office of Disability Services

<http://www.usd.edu/student-life/disability-services>

Director: Ernetta Fox

605-677-6389

Room 119B

Service Center North

disabilityservices@usd.edu