ACADEMIC POLICY
TECHNICAL STANDARDS ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS
(Effective Spring 2024)

The University of Hartford Doctor of Physical Therapy Program (DPT Program) is committed to upholding the standards and guidelines set forth by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. Within these parameters, the DPT Program has the flexibility and overarching responsibility for both selecting and evaluating its students. Ensuring public safety is paramount, and thus, the DPT Program aims to equip its graduates with the necessary skills to deliver safe and effective physical therapy services as collaborative professionals. This includes integrating the latest evidence for optimal health outcomes within diverse interdisciplinary health systems and society at large. Admission and retention decisions are not solely based on academic performance but also take into account technical standards and essential functions, ensuring that candidates possess the attributes required for graduation.

These technical standards and essential functions are related to the essential career abilities and licensing requirements required of physical therapists.

Technical standards are the skills and attributes expected of students. Although they are not academic in nature they may be related to academic knowledge.

Essential functions are the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student must demonstrate once enrolled in the program to continue in the program and to graduate.

Prospective and current students of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program must demonstrate the ability to fulfill the Technical Standards and Essential Functions required by the program for graduation. Thus, meeting these standards is a prerequisite for admission or ongoing enrollment in the DPT Program. Failure to meet program qualifications, including the Technical Standards and Essential Functions, may result in withdrawal of an admission offer or dismissal from the program.

Students in the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at the University of Hartford are required to be able to meet the following technical standards and perform the following essential functions:

A. Cognitive/Reasoning Skills

1. Cognitive Skills:

Students must possess a range of cognitive and reasoning skills that allows them to master the broad and complex body of knowledge that comprises a physical therapy curriculum. This includes the ability to follow course syllabi, assignments/exams, practical examinations, and any other action plans developed by the faculty/program. Students must be able to comprehend, organize, prioritize, memorize, analyze, and synthesize information from scientific and clinical sources.

Students must demonstrate the ability to learn and educate others through a wide variety of modalities, including, but not limited to:

a. Classroom instruction;
b. Small group discussion;
c. Individual study of materials;
d. Preparation and presentation of written and oral reports;
e. Use of computer-based technology;
f. Online instruction;
g. Clinical/hands-on experiences.

Students must be able to demonstrate the ability to perform these cognitive skills in an efficient and effective manner in an environment where there are frequent distractions and constant demands on productivity that is inherent to the needs in the clinical environment.

2. Reasoning Abilities:

Students must be able to analyze and synthesize information from various sources. Students must learn to solve difficult problems and to make diagnostic, prognostic, and therapeutic intervention decisions in a timely manner consistent with professional practice.

Specific, required **Reasoning Abilities** include but are not limited to the ability to:

a. Analyze and evaluate results of patient examinations and formulate appropriate patient diagnosis, prognosis, and plan of care.
b. Apply information and complete decision-making and problem-solving tasks in a timely manner consistent with industry standards.
c. Analyze and incorporate scientific information, from a variety of sources, into their own application of therapeutic practice
    1. Undertake effective research to develop professional expertise and inform decision making;
    2. Exercise sound judgment with the benefit of this information and knowledge/skills;
    3. Evaluate the effectiveness of professional interventions.
d. Identify and communicate when help is needed and make proper decisions regarding when a task should or should not be carried out alone.
e. Respond with timely, precise, and appropriate action in an emergency.
f. Perform effectively under stress or in unusual situations.

B. Sensory and Motor Skills:

1. Motor skills

Students must have sufficient motor control to provide general treatment and emergency care of patients within the guidelines of the Physical Therapy Practice Act. Accordingly, students must be able to demonstrate gross and fine motor skills in a safe and effective manner in order to optimize patient care, including sufficient motor skills to obtain adequate information from a physical therapy exam and provide safe and effective interventions to patients of all ages, sizes, and genders. The student must demonstrate the physical ability to sufficiently move a patient and self around varying work environments, on various surfaces, and to and from various levels. Students must possess adequate motor ability to respond efficiently and effectively in emergency situations.

The overall physical demand rating for a job of a physical therapist falls within the medium classification according to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles[1]. However, due to the population in contracted facilities, this position has been classified as Heavy (exerting 50 to 100 pounds of force occasionally, and/or 20 to 50 pounds of force frequently, and/or 10 to 20 pounds of force constantly to move objects).

Examples of specific motor skills include but are not limited to:

a. The assumption of awkward postures, movement between rooms and classes, movement in tight spaces, and physical endurance and strength to perform successfully in physical therapy settings.
    1. Assume and maintain a variety of body postures (e.g., sitting, standing, walking, bending, squatting, kneeling, stair climbing, reaching forward or overhead, turning, moving the trunk and neck in all directions) to adequately perform patient examination and interventions
    2. Adapt manual inputs/contacts based on patient effort.
b. Attend class 30 or more hours per week including lecture, laboratory, and integrated clinical experiences.
c. Provide physical therapy care in a clinical setting for 40 or more hours per week.
d. Sit and maintain an upright posture for up to 8 hours daily.

e. Stand and maintain an upright posture for up to 10 hours daily.
f. Walk for up to 4 hours daily.
g. Lift up to 50 pounds frequently and 100 pounds occasionally
    1. Assist in performing a multi-person safe transfer of obese patients.
    2. Provide manual resistance sufficient for a maximal manual muscle test of a large muscle group.
    3. Manage and manipulate limbs of all sizes to accurately assess joint mobility.
h. Carry up to 50 pounds.
i. Provide safe patient mobility including lifting, turning, bending forward and backward, positioning, transferring, and performing therapeutic techniques and exercise with patients.
    1. Assist a patient with safe floor <-> stand transfers.
    2. Enter small areas (e.g., bathroom, car) and assist patients with safe transfers.
    3. Balance self and provide support/balance to patients and equipment on a variety of surfaces including level and uneven ground, ramps, curbs, and stairs.
    4. Maintain simultaneous control of durable medical equipment (e.g., walker) and the patient during treatment;
j. Use of standard industry equipment.
    1. Use of surgical instruments for activities such as anatomy dissections and wound debridement.
    2. Use of a keyboard or equivalent device to record patient information
k. Perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).
l. Maintain sufficient endurance to effectively manage patient care
m. Access transportation to and from clinical and didactic sites.

2. Sensory & Observation Skills:

Visual, Auditory, and Tactile Competencies: Observation requires the functional use of vision, hearing and somatic senses. Students must possess sufficient visual, auditory, and tactile abilities to allow them to gather data from written reference material, from oral presentations, and from observed demonstrations including lectures, laboratory demonstrations, in-class demonstrations, and patients in the classroom and clinic. In addition, students must have adequate visual, auditory, and tactile competencies to respond efficiently and effectively in an emergency.

Students must maintain sufficient **Visual, Auditory, and Tactile Abilities** to perform various parts of the patient examination and intervention, including, but not limited to the ability to:

a. Must have adequate sensory function to evaluate patients' range of motion, muscle function, cardiopulmonary status, and motor control.
    1. Palpation of peripheral pulses, bony landmarks, and ligamentous structures.
    2. Visual and tactile evaluation of areas for inflammation or edema.
    3. Use of a stethoscope, sphygmomanometer, and goniometer.
        i. Auscultate the heart and lungs;
    4. Detect muscle activity sufficiently to distinguish trace contractions.
    5. Examine skin integrity and wounds
    6. Palpate changes in an individual's muscle tone, soft tissues, skin quality, joint play, kinesthesia, and temperature.
    7. Assess temperature of therapeutic agents, including hot pack, cold pack, water, and paraffin bath
b. Must be able to observe and accurately analyze patients' condition, responses, and movement patterns as part of the problem-solving component of patient examination.
    1. Monitor physiologic changes in patient status to adjust or discontinue treatment.
    2. Visually examine patient movement patterns and non-verbal expressions in order to adjust treatment.
    3. Observe posture, facial expression, and quality and speed of movement.
    4. Inspect skin condition including color, temperature, moisture, and texture

c. Must be able to observe, analyze, and interact with the patient environment
    1. Assess environmental safety.
    2. Read documents including patient charts, lab reports, and scientific literature.
    3. Read equipment outputs
    4. Functional hearing that includes the auditory ability sufficient to monitor and assess patient health needs.
        i. Hear medical alarms or patient vocalizations in an emergency.

C. Behavioral/Social Attributes:

It is necessary for students to demonstrate honesty, integrity, and dignity in the classroom, clinical environment, and independent work. Students must display attributes of flexibility, initiative, maturity, and compassion throughout the didactic and clinical preparation of their education while maintaining a professional demeanor. Students will respect and appropriately respond to the differing needs of peers, faculty, and patients. Students will respect individuals from a variety of ages, races, genders, ethnicities, socioeconomic, religious, and cultural backgrounds and may present with various pathologies, diagnoses, and impairments. Students must have the ability to function according to, and exhibit the behaviors detailed in, the American Physical Therapy Association Code of Ethics and Guide for Professional Conduct.

Examples of specific required professional behaviors include but are not limited to:

1. Professional Behaviors

a. Maintain professionalism in the context of time, environmental, and situational constraints.
    1. Arrive and be on time for professional commitments including class and clinical experiences.
    2. Abide by the appropriate dress code (academic and clinical).
    3. Manage and prioritize tasks to meet responsibilities.
    4. Meet deadlines for course assignments and program requirements;
        i. Seek assistance in a timely manner;
    5. Manage personal affairs in a manner that does not interfere with professional responsibilities.
    6. Monitor and manage one's own stress.
    7. Participate in multiple tasks simultaneously.
    8. Work effectively in groups.
    9. Be truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications
b. Be accountable for the outcomes of academic activities.
    1. Accept and respond appropriately to constructive feedback;
    2. Perform one's own work, give credit for the ideas of others, and provide proper citation of source materials;
c. Present oneself in a professional manner to peers, faculty, patients, clients and the community.
    1. Interact courteously, fairly, and professionally with diverse individuals;
    2. Demonstrate the ability to understand the perspectives of others in the context of teaching, counseling, and administration;
    3. Demonstrate attitudes of integrity, responsibility, and tolerance;
d. Be accountable for the outcomes of clinical decision making and clinical care.
    1. Protect the confidentiality of patient information consistent with current applicable law and clinical site guidelines.
    2. Participate and perform in a manner consistent with real clinical practice guidelines during lab, practical, standardized or simulated experiences in order to learn and demonstrate curricular related knowledge.
    3. Comply with the ethical standards of the American Physical Therapy Association.
e. Demonstrate self-health and hygiene abilities and characteristics that do not compromise the health and safety of peers, faculty, patients, and the community.
f. Maintain general good health, self-care, and hygiene.
    1. Minimize exposure to and seek appropriate treatment for communicable diseases.

2. Demonstrate appropriate behaviors and attitudes in order not to jeopardize the emotional, physical, and mental health and safety of peers, faculty, patients, clients and the community.
3. Pass a drug-screen examination and criminal background check.

Students must meet specific Professional Requirements, including abiding by all applicable University and programmatic policies. Requirements include, but are not limited to, satisfactory completion of background checks and drug-screens, as well as the ability to comply with all applicable state and federal regulations as required by the State of Connecticut, the state in which they reside and the state in which clinical placements are located. Please note that criminal histories may also prevent a student from taking the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy National Physical Therapy Exam (FSBPT NPTE).

D. Communication Skills:

Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, families, faculty, preceptors, peers, and members of the healthcare team within learning experiences. Effective communication includes verbal and non-verbal interactions, such as the interpretation of facial expressions, affect and body language. The student also must be able to receive, interpret and send written communications in a timely manner consistent with contemporary practice. Fluency in the English language is required at matriculation into the program, although applications from students with hearing and/or speech disabilities will receive full consideration.

Examples of specific required communication skills include but are not limited to:

1. Communication Skills

a. Able to comprehend English and communicate verbally and in writing in an efficient manner so that educators, peers, health-care team members, patients, and family members understand the intent of the communication.
b. Be sensitive to the needs of individuals from all backgrounds and groups and respond appropriately to the verbal and nonverbal messages that these individuals provide.
c. Be sensitive to the verbal and nonverbal message that they communicate to educators, peers, health care team members, patients, and family members and modify communication as appropriate.
d. Accurate perception of nonverbal information and cues in interpersonal encounters.
e. Efficient, effective, accurate and timely communication using a range of communication media appropriate to the purpose and audience.
f. Use of communication and sensory skills to accurately elicit information including a patient's history and other information necessary to effectively evaluate a client or patient's condition.

It is considered an essential function for students to be able to perform/demonstrate the aforementioned tasks/skills/behaviors (sections A-D) in a time constrained fashion consistent with the clinical environment.

Reasonable Accommodations

Students who seek reasonable accommodations for documented disabilities must contact the University's Access-ability Services as soon as possible after admission to the DPT Program.

Access-Ability Services at the University of Hartford provides accommodations and services to students with disabilities to ensure a university experience that gives individuals with disabilities the same access to programs, opportunities and activities as all others. The staff in Access-Ability Services engages in an interactive process with each student and review requests for accommodations on a case-by-case basis. In determining reasonable accommodations, we consider each student's condition(s), history, experience, request, and the unique characteristics of each course and program.

Students who qualify based on a documented disability are eligible for reasonable and appropriate accommodations. However, these accommodations must not fundamentally change the essence of the DPT program, which includes technical standards and essential functions. It's important to note that while students may qualify for classroom accommodations, these same accommodations may not be applicable in a clinical setting if they alter the technical or essential standards of the DPT Program.

Procedure for Assessing Compliance of Technical Standards and Essential Functions
Program faculty will assess each student's ability to meet the Technical Standards and Essential Functions.

Students must meet the Technical Standards at all time points upon entering the program.

- The Technical Standards and Essential Functions will be available on the University of Hartford DPT admissions requirements webpage for applicants to view before applying to the program.

- The applicant will read this document and will attest to their understanding of "Technical Standards and Essential Functions Statement of Understanding" within PTCAS (Physical Therapist Central Application System) at the time of application.

- The standards will be reviewed and attested to again during program orientation for matriculated students.

- Essential Functions must be met before entering the full-time clinical education component of the curriculum. This will be assessed as part of the DPT program's clinical readiness review.

- Failure to meet the Technical Standards and Essential Functions may prevent the student from entering the clinical education component of the curriculum or from progressing to more demanding aspects of the academic program and could result in removal from the program.

References:

1. Physical demands as published by the US Department of Labor: Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 4th, Edition.
2. https://www.onetonline.org/link/details/29-1123.00
3. American Physical Therapy Association. Minimum Required Skills of Physical Therapist Graduates at Entry Level. BOD G11-05-20-449.
4. American Physical Therapy Association. Guide to Physical Therapist Practice. Alexandria, Virginia, 2008.
5. AASIG Technical Standards, Essential Functions Document. Section on Education, September 1998.
6. Ingram, D. (1997). Opinions of Physical Therapy Program Directors on Essential Functions, Physical Therapy, 77(1).