

Essential Functions and Technical Standards

PROGRAM IN PHYSICAL THERAPY

Department of Physical Therapy, CSU Sacramento

The Graduate Program in Physical Therapy at Sacramento State is a difficult and intense program which places specific demands on a student enrolled in the program. The demands placed on the students during their academic and clinical preparation correspond closely to the intellectual and physical demands which a graduate will encounter as a practicing physical therapist.

The program at Sacramento State has been designed to prepare students to enter the profession as a generalist with the skills, knowledge, and ability to successfully perform all the required functions associated with the role of an entry-level physical therapist. Our goal is that all graduates will be competent in performing the skills listed in the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Minimum Required Skills of Physical Therapist Graduates at Entry-Level.¹

The purpose of this document is to delineate the essential functions associated with the role of the physical therapy student and the entry-level physical therapist, and to identify the technical standards needed to perform those functions.

In keeping with applicable federal and state laws regarding disabilities and with our program philosophy, we are committed to making reasonable accommodations for all individuals with disabilities to enable them to successfully complete their education and to perform the skills necessary to the role of an entry-level physical therapist. There is an expectation that every student will be able to perform the essential functions required for entry-level physical therapists, with or without reasonable accommodations, while practicing safely, ethically, and in a legal manner. A reasonable accommodation means any reasonable modification of the institution's rules, policies or practices. This may include, but is not limited to environmental adjustments (such as the removal of architectural or communicative barriers) or auxiliary aids and services. An accommodation is not reasonable if it would result in undue financial or administrative burdens, require a fundamental alteration to the horizontal or vertical integrity of the physical therapy program curriculum, violate accreditation requirements, or require the waiver of essential program requirements. If a student feels they have a disability which may require accommodation to perform any of the tasks identified below, it is the student's responsibility to initiate the process with the Services to Students with Disabilities office.

Please read carefully the documents titled "Essential Functions" and "Technical Standards" to determine whether you are able to perform the required tasks.

¹ American Physical Therapy Association, Minimum required skills of physical therapist graduates at entry-level. BOD P11-05-20-49;2005

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

To perform the role of an entry-level physical therapist and be successful in the physical therapy program the student must be able to:

1. Utilize appropriate and effective spoken, written and non-verbal communication with faculty, students, staff, administrators, patients, families and others. Students must be able to use and understand the English language at a level consistent with competent professional practice.
2. Perform appropriate physical therapy (PT) examination and intervention procedures in a safe, reliable, ethical, legal and efficient manner.
3. Appropriately identify and determine the PT diagnosis, prognosis and needs of any patient whose condition falls within the scope of practice of PT.
4. Demonstrate the ability to consistently adhere to, and apply universal precautions in appropriate situations.
5. Develop and document a plan of care appropriate for patient's status and desired goals.
6. Recognize the psychosocial impact of dysfunction and disability and integrate the needs of the patient and family into the plan of care.
7. Demonstrate management skills for PT practice, which would include supervision, delegation, and working as a member of the health care team.
8. Develop and implement programs for prevention, education, and health promotion which appropriately utilize theories of teaching and learning in both health care and community environments.
9. Comprehend, integrate, and synthesize information from the clinical, natural, and social sciences.

TECHNICAL STANDARDS

Technical standards, as distinguished from academic standards, refer to those abilities required for satisfactory completion of all aspects of the curriculum, and the development of professional attributes required by the faculty of all students at graduation. To perform the essential functions and be successful in this physical therapy educational curriculum, an individual must possess specific skills and abilities. These abilities can be divided into 4 categories:

1. Motor and Sensory abilities
2. Cognitive abilities
3. Communication abilities
4. Affective/behavioral abilities

To accomplish the essential functions of the role of an entry-level physical therapist, the student must be able to:

1. Motor and Sensory abilities

A. Observation abilities

- Accurately observe the patient's activity, movement and behavior during examinations and interventions, both from close up and at a distance of up to 30 ft away.
- Appropriately take an oral patient history.

- Detect and respond to monitoring alarms, timers, emergency signals, cries for help.
- Detect changes in patient status which may indicate signs of physiological changes or signs of distress, such as: color and integrity of skin, breathing pattern, muscle tone, and facial expressions.
- Interpret illustrated materials in patient charts including diagnostic tests such as EKG and radiographs.
- Accurately monitor dials, displays, and equipment used in treatment of patients including exercise equipment and electrical modalities.

B. Mobility

- Demonstrate sufficient balance, coordination and ability to accompany and detect loss of balance in patients who are walking.
- Demonstrate the ability to support and guard patients who lose their balance during walking on level surfaces, as well as on stairs and uneven terrains/ramps.
- Demonstrate sufficient freedom of movement to be able to participate in all classroom and clinical activities and provide safe and effective examination and interventions.
- Demonstrate sufficient balance and coordination to be able to participate in all classroom and clinic activities and provide safe and effective examinations and interventions, including positioning patients.
- Attend clinical internships in assigned locations and accomplish required mobility tasks in clinical settings.
- Perform emergency procedures such as CPR in a clinical setting.

C. Strength tasks

- Demonstrate sufficient strength to be able to participate in all classroom and clinic activities and provide safe and effective examinations and interventions, such as accommodating resistance and stability to all parts of the body, lifting and carrying heavy objects, guarding and transferring patients
- Safely lift and transfer patients between sitting surfaces requiring up to total assist.
- Safely assist and facilitate patients during gait training.
- Safely and effectively administer exercise and examination procedures which require resistance or facilitation.
- Demonstrate sufficient strength and endurance to tolerate physically demanding workloads sustained over the course of a typical work or school day
- Manually adjust exercise equipment and assistive devices.

D. Fine motor and coordination skills

- Use palpation and touch to accurately assess changes in muscle tone, tissue and skin temperature, joint position, auscultation, joint play and other diagnostic maneuvers.
- Effectively apply compression, retraction, resistance, and percussion.
- Accurately set equipment dials and apply modalities.
- Complete and accurately assess vital signs (e.g., BP, pulse, and other examination procedures).
- Demonstrate sufficient fine motor skills to be able to manipulate small objects

- Demonstrate sufficient fine motor and gross motor coordination skills to be able to provide safe and effective examinations and interventions
- Demonstrate sufficient spatial awareness to be able to perform gross motor movements with partners and patients
- Demonstrate sufficient visual, auditory, or tactile senses to respond to patient/client needs in a busy clinical environment
- Respond to bells and alarms related to emergencies and/or patient/client care
- Submit clear and complete documentation in a timely fashion.

2. Cognitive abilities

- Comprehend, integrate, and synthesize a large body of knowledge in a short period of time.
- Utilize knowledge of natural, clinical, and social sciences to develop appropriate interventions in a clinical setting.
- Use appropriate written and verbal formats for communication of patient information and classroom assignments.
- Use critical analysis to understand theory, research literature, and principles that apply to physical therapy practice.
- Apply inductive and deductive clinical reasoning to solve complex patient problems.
- Reflect on performance accurately to self-assess.
- Measure, calculate, and reason.
- Identify significant findings based upon history and physical examination
- Interpret laboratory and diagnostic imaging data
- Comprehend three-dimensional spatial relationships of anatomic structures
- Utilize sufficient judgment to ensure safe encounters with peers and patients
- Utilize sufficient judgment to effectively delegate to assistive personnel

3. Communication abilities

- Communicate effectively and efficiently in oral and written English
- Communicate appropriately with patients, family members, physicians, and other health care providers.
- Participate in group meetings to deliver and receive complex information
- Respond to questions from a variety of sources
- Respond appropriately to verbal and non-verbal communication
- Share information formally and informally with others
- Complete paper and/or online forms and documentation according to directions in a timely fashion
- Demonstrate sufficient communication skills to effectively train patients, families and assistive personnel

4. Affective/behavioral abilities

- Demonstrate appreciation and respect for individual, social, and cultural differences in fellow students, professional colleagues, patients and caregivers.
- Demonstrate appropriate behaviors and attitudes to protect the safety, confidentiality and well being of patients, faculty and classmates.

- Demonstrate ability to appropriately handle situations which may be physically, emotionally or intellectually stressful including situations which must be handled swiftly and calmly.
- Demonstrate flexibility and the ability to adjust to changing situations and uncertainty in an academic or clinical environment.
- Abide by the APTA code of Ethics, the Standards of Physical Therapy Practice and the Core Values which can be found on the American Physical Therapy Association website at www.apta.org.
- Establish professional, empathic relationships with individuals across the life span and from various cultures.
- Demonstrate integrity and honesty in the academic and clinical environment.
- Engage in respectful interactions with individuals from various lifestyles, cultures, races, socioeconomic classes, and abilities.
- Develop and maintain respectful working relationships with peers, faculty, professional colleagues, patients, family members and the general public.
- Recognize the psychosocial impact of movement dysfunctions and disability on clients and families.
- Self-evaluate through a process of reflection and provide objective peer assessments and constructive faculty assessments.
- Accept constructive feedback and respond with suitable action

Upon acceptance into the program, students will be asked to sign a statement that reads:

I have read and understand the essential functions and technical standards for physical therapy students. I believe, to the best of my knowledge, that I can meet each of these technical standards with or without reasonable accommodation. If I am unable to perform any technical standard(s) without accommodation, I will, at the earliest possible time, initiate the process with the Office of Services to Students with Disabilities (SSWD) to establish the presence of a disability, and to determine the impact in the academic and/or clinical environment. The SSWD office, in consultation with the relevant physical therapy faculty, will make the determination of reasonable accommodation. I understand that appeals to the SSWD determination may be brought to the Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action department in the Office of Human Resources at CSUS, who will assess the determination in compliance with ADA Title II. Details of the University Discrimination Complaint procedure are at <http://www.csus.edu/umanual/hr/UMS16310.htm>. If, during the course of my enrollment in the physical therapy program, a new disability arises which would impair my ability to demonstrate any technical standard, I will immediately seek reasonable accommodation as above. I understand that I am not qualified to participate in the physical therapy program if I present a direct threat to the health or safety of myself or others.