



Oct. 24, 2011

Physical Therapy will add doctorate program

Sacramento State's Department of Physical Therapy has been authorized to offer a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree, making it the University's second independent doctoral program. Applications are being accepted until Monday, Jan. 16, and the program begins in Fall 2012. To date, there have been more than 400 applicants for 32 slots.

Department Director Susan McGinty is especially excited that Sac State is the first California State University campus to receive the requisite authorization to move forward. She's no less proud of her faculty, which will have the opportunity to take the current master's program to an even higher level.

Sacramento State Provost Joseph Sheley agrees. "The doctorate in Physical Therapy is a significant achievement for Sacramento State. It benefits the students and faculty in the program and, by virtue of the quality of the new degree, it will do much for the region. Perhaps most important, the DPT encourages our University to focus even more sharply upon our potential to become the region's educational leader in the applied health sector."

The three-year program will enable Sac State graduates to keep pace with the body of knowledge in the field that has expanded exponentially in the last several years. McGinty says, "Our graduates will be able to provide direct access treatment to patients who require care in states where it is allowed." She notes that California is likely to join 37 other states that provide such access without a physician referral.

The program, which will phase out the current master's curriculum by 2014, is designed to elevate the level of education that graduates receive so they can reach the pinnacle of their respective professions. It will offer students an extra semester to augment their knowledge of orthopedics and anatomy, and add courses in health and wellness, geriatrics, diagnostic imaging and neuroscience. Students will also complete 36 weeks of full-time internships at three separate locations to learn by doing in their respective specialties.

The doctoral program will be the first in the nation to integrate a mock electronic medical records (EMR) system into its curriculum, thereby preparing students to discover and document data from simulated medical records. The department is one of the few to use a simulation lab (in Folsom Hall) to educate physical therapy students, along with nursing students, to care for and respond to emergencies with patients in an acute-care environment.

Established in 1995, the Physical Therapy Department has been dedicated to the success and professional development of students. The first graduating class in 1997 provided a cadre of generalist practitioners who utilize critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and practice lifelong learning.

Sacramento State's physical therapy graduates have been destined for jobs in their specialty. "We have a 100 percent placement rate," Professor Michael McKeough says, adding that the program has a 98 percent passing rate on the licensing examination – 11 points above the national average.

That impressive track record is about to become even stronger because the doctoral program's primary mission is to produce more skilled physical therapists, generalist practitioners and health care leaders.

McGinty hastens to add that the department's pro bono clinics, where faculty-supervised students provide rehabilitative care for participants whose insurance benefits have expired, will remain intact. "Nothing is more authentic to training than being able to treat actual patients," she says. "This is applied learning at its best." These clinics benefit Sac State students and community members, which underscores the University's core mission of service.

Prospective applicants for the Physical Therapy doctoral program should visit http://www.hhs.csus.edu/Special/PT/SupApp/App_Page_1of2.asp.

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