

ASU Caduceus News



Spotlight On: Physical Therapy

Each week we will be spotlighting a different health profession. In addition, we will also put out editions focusing on common questions like, should I be an MD/DO or a PA? Today's spotlight is on Physical Therapy. If you have a health profession or question you think should be addressed, feel free to email us and let us know at prehealthtempe@asu.edu

What is Physical Therapy?

Physical Therapists are evidence-based healthcare professionals. The goal of physical therapy is to help restore function, improve movement, manage pain, and prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs. Physical therapists work to diagnose and treat patients by learning the functional limitations of their patients in order to make individualized treatment plans and to monitor improvement.

Physical therapists work as part of a healthcare team, overseeing physical therapy assistants and aides, and consulting with physicians and other specialists.

Qualities and personality traits necessary for a career in physical therapy

- **Physical stamina** - as a PT you will be on your feet for most of the day and working directly with patients to show them exercises or to assist in performing movements. PT's should enjoy physical activity. Many PT's say exercise and movement is an integral part of their personal lifestyle
- **Dexterity** - PT's are hands-on, working with patients to provide manual therapy and therapeutic exercises. You should feel comfortable massaging and otherwise physically engaging with patients
- **Compassion** - PT's help people directly and a desire to help others is often a central factor in entering the profession. However, it's important to realize not all your patients will want your help. Some have been suffering in pain for years and many are in a vulnerable position of being hurt. Having compassion for your patients, maintaining a

positive environment, and showing empathy for patients is integral to success in the field.

- **Interpersonal skills** - while it is not necessary for you to be an extrovert, PT's spend a lot of time engaging directly with patients. They must have strong communication skills to explain treatment programs, motivate patients, and listen to patients' concerns as they relate to treatment.
- **Resourcefulness** - PT plans are not "one size fits all" and it often takes time to develop a plan that works for your patient. PT's should be flexible and adaptive when determining plans of care to change them when necessary.
- **Overall** - To succeed as a physical therapist, you'll also need to be an effective communicator and have strong interpersonal skills to motivate your patients and provide compassionate care. On average, physical therapists tend to spend more one-on-one time with patients than many other types of healthcare practitioners, so building trust and positive rapport is essential.

Pre-Physical Therapy Requirements

Students planning to enter physical therapy school should focus on academic and non-academic factors prior to application.

Academics:

All physical therapy schools require you to complete prerequisite coursework prior to admission. The total number of classes required does not pertain to any particular major, but will consist of a number of foundational science courses. These courses will provide the baseline for entering the more grueling academic courses in physical therapy school. You may major in whatever you like provided you plan to take the prerequisite courses prior to applying. Physical therapy schools place no preference on one major over another, though they do place a preference on a high GPA over a low GPA.

Letters of Recommendation:

Physical Therapy schools will require you to submit letters of recommendation along with your application. Letters should come primarily from academic science professors you've had in a classroom setting. Students may also consider a physical therapist and a research PI/mentor as additional letters. You should be introducing yourself to faculty members and engaging throughout the semester to build a good working relationship prior to asking for a letter. Coming from a large university with large classes will not absolve you from needing letters. Letters are an important component to your application and are reviewed prior to admitting you to an optometry program.

Physical Therapy Observation:

Exposure to the field of physical therapy is essential to articulating why you are interested in entering the profession. Students should aim to spend time shadowing, volunteering, or

working in settings with physical therapists throughout their time as an ASU student. Although all types of exposure are accepted, if you have the opportunity to engage with physical therapists in a variety of settings (in-patient versus outpatient, geriatric, sports, etc.). While there is no minimum number of hours students should complete, the more exposure you gain the better understanding you will have of the pros and cons to entering the profession.

Many D.P.T. programs require physical therapy observation hours that can be verified by a PT. The [Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service](#) (PTCAS) provides a summary [PT Observation Hours](#) of programs that participate in PTCAS. Observation hour requirements vary by program and some programs are more specific about the setting of experience (e.g. outpatient and inpatient) than others. PTCAS provides instructions on reporting your PT observation and work experience in PTCAS. This includes the licensed PT you observed or worked with, facility information, experience dates and details, settings, and hours of experience.

Non-Academics:

Students should also plan to engage outside the classroom through internships, volunteer work, student employment, part/full-time employment, and/or research. What you choose to do with your time will help schools build a picture of who you are, what your interests are, and what responsibilities you had in addition to being a student. There is no preference for students to engage in one type of activity over another.

Physical Therapy Club Downtown Phoenix

Email: physicaltherapyclub.asu@gmail.com

Pre-Optometry Summer Programs

- [Duke DPT Summer Discovery Program](#)

Physical Therapy School

There are **261** Physical Therapy programs in the US and students typically apply to 5-10 schools

There are 4 (soon to be 5) Doctor of Physical Therapy programs in Arizona:

- Northern Arizona University - Flagstaff & Downtown Phoenix (Public Program)
- Midwestern University - Glendale
- Franklin Pierce- Peoria
- A.T. Still University - Mesa
- Creighton - Phoenix (Coming soon!!)

Physical Therapy school is typically 3 years

The length of professional DPT programs is typically three years. Primary content areas in the curriculum may include, but are not limited to, biology/anatomy, cellular histology, physiology,

exercise physiology, biomechanics, kinesiology, neuroscience, pharmacology, pathology, behavioral sciences, communication, ethics/values, management sciences, finance, sociology, clinical reasoning, evidence-based practice, cardiovascular and pulmonary, endocrine and metabolic, and musculoskeletal.

Approximately 80% of the DPT curriculum is classroom (didactic) and lab study and the remaining 20% is dedicated to clinical education. PT students spend on average 27.5 weeks in their final clinical experience.

In order to practice as a physical therapist, you must complete your degree and pass a state licensing exam. The licensing exam consists of written and clinical portions - students will complete the written portions during OD school.

Average GPA for accepted students: 3.57

Average GRE scores for accepted students (% rank) - Verbal (54.5%), Quant (48%), Analytical (57.5%)

Physical Therapy Outlook

Physical Therapy is a growing profession, expected to grow nearly 36% in the next 10 years. Compensation: The mean salary for optometrists is currently \$89,000

Cost

GRE Test: \$205

- Results sent to 4 schools or programs
- \$27 per score report for additional schools

GRE Prep: Average \$500, but can increase to over \$1000

PTCAS Application: \$155 + \$60 per additional school

- Average: \$500

Fee Assistance: Yes - <http://www.ptcas.org/Fees/>

Secondary Applications: Varies, \$0-75

Interviews: Varies

Average Application Costs: \$2,000

Average Tuition at Physical Therapy School: \$22,000 (public), \$45,000 (private)

Average Debt from Physical Therapy School: \$70,000-100,000

Average Salary for Physical Therapy - \$89,000

Cost is a major factor when considering any type of professional healthcare degree. Many physical therapists will encourage you to determine whether you really love the profession before committing. This is also one reason schools will require observation and other experiences in a physical therapy environment prior to applying. Physical Therapy is a rewarding career with many options and opportunities to weigh, but students who are passionate about improving range of motion and rehab should not let the prospect of high debt scare them away. There are many options for paying down debt and most PT's are able to do so comfortably, though payoff may take as many as 20-years.

Videos and resources for more information:

[Should You Become A Physical Therapist](#) with Bob & Brad (DPT's)

[PT Progress](#) - YouTube Channel

[My Road to PT](#) - Blog

[APTA: A Career in Physical Therapy](#)

[APTA: Benefits of a Career in PT](#)

[Explore Health Careers: Physical Therapy](#)

[American Physical Therapy Association](#)

[ChoosePT](#)

An overview of the role and conditions cared for by a Physical Therapist

- Consulting with patients to learn about their physical condition and symptoms
- Diagnosing movement dysfunction and developing a treatment plan
- Teaching patients how to properly use therapeutic exercise techniques
- Providing stimulation or massage to promote healing
- Assisting patients with the use of equipment such as wheelchairs or walkers
- Maintaining patient records and keeping track of goals and progress
- Advising the patient and family about in-home treatment options and exercises
- In a hospital setting, nursing home, or a rehabilitation facility, PT's will share information and coordinate your treatment plan with a variety of care providers on site such as physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists, or physical therapy assistants.
- In an outpatient clinic, PT's will also communicate with the patient's primary care provider to develop and modify treatment plans. PT's may also work in conjunction with a massage therapist, or may supervise a physical therapy assistant or exercise specialist as well.

