

EXPLORING: PHYSICAL THERAPY

Overview

Physical Therapists (PTs), help people who have injuries or illnesses improve their movement and manage their pain. They are often an important part of rehabilitation and treatment of patients with chronic conditions or injuries.

Typical Duties

- ▶ Diagnose patients' dysfunctional movements by watching them stand/walk and by listening to their concerns
- ▶ Collaborate with patient's physician to set up a plan for their patients, outlining the patient's goals and the planned treatments
- ▶ Use exercises, stretching maneuvers, hands-on therapy, and equipment to ease patients' pain and to help increase mobility
- ▶ Evaluate a patient's progress, modifying a treatment plan and trying new treatments as needed
- ▶ Educate patients and their families about what to expect during recovery from injury and illness and how best to cope

Key Information

- In 2021, the median salary for PTs: \$95,620 and employment of PTs is expected to grow 17% by 2031.
- Physical therapists provide care to people of all ages who have functional problems resulting from back and neck injuries, sprains, strains, and fractures, arthritis, amputations, stroke, birth conditions, such as cerebral palsy, injuries related to work and sports, and other conditions.
- Physical therapists are trained to use a variety of techniques—sometimes called modalities—to care for their patients. These techniques include applying heat and cold, hands-on stimulation or massage, and using assistive and adaptive devices and equipment.

Education Programs

Physical therapists are required to have a professional degree. PT programs award a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree. View [a complete list of DPT programs](#) on the American Physical Therapy Association's website. Doctoral programs typically last 3 years. Eighty percent (80%) of the DPT curriculum comprises classroom (didactic) and lab study and the remaining 20 percent (20%) is dedicated to clinical education.

Typical Application Timeline

Many PT programs have multiple deadline dates or operate on a rolling admissions process.

Admission Requirements: Knowledge and Strategies

Work with your faculty advisor to plan for prerequisite requirements. Start early and consult each institution's individual website for specific requirements! Prerequisites vary widely so it is extremely important to check with professional programs that Denison's curriculum aligns with their expectations for prerequisites.

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Typical Prerequisites Include:

- ▶ Anatomy & Physiology I and Anatomy & Physiology II
- ▶ Biology I & II and Advanced Biology
- ▶ Chemistry I & II and Physics I & II
- ▶ Psychology and Advanced Psychology
- ▶ Statistics and English Composition

Prepare for and take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

- It is recommended that you take the test at least one year before you want to go to PT school. Most of those who take the GRE do so after their third year of college. [Learn more about the GRE](#) on ETS's website.
- Programs may set minimum scores and last acceptable test dates, but not every program will require the GRE.
 - Check your schools individually [using this chart on PTCAS](#).
- Content tested:
 - Verbal Reasoning — ability to analyze and evaluate written material and synthesize information obtained
 - Quantitative Reasoning — basic concepts of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data analysis
 - Analytical Writing — critical thinking and analytical writing skills

Admissions is based on holistic review, involving factors beyond GRE scores and GPA:

- ▶ Exposure to Physical Therapy. Some programs will require PT observation hours as part of the admissions process. Multiple sites may be required. As you shadow, keep track of hours and practitioner contact information carefully and take notes on your experiences. Check out this list of [PT observation hour requirements by program](#).
- ▶ Research experience
- ▶ Leadership and involvement
- ▶ Volunteering and employment

Additional Tips

- Focus on academic success: PT programs often have minimum GPA requirements
- Applicants who only meet the minimum GPA may not be competitive.
- Build relationships: create a strong network of pre-health advisors, faculty, peers and professionals. Remember, such connections can open up opportunities for you and letters of recommendation will be required to apply
- Remember you will apply through a centralized form: The Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service ([PTCAS](#))
- Plan financially: there is a cost associated with taking the GRE and applying to schools

Want more information?

Schedule an appointment through [Handshake](#) to meet with a career coach, learn more and create plans to meet your goals!