



ARCADIA UNIVERSITY

DPT PROGRAM

Essential Functions and Technical Standards

Arcadia University is dedicated to supporting the success of all students by ensuring equal access to its programs, facilities, and services. In alignment with the Americans with Disabilities Act (as amended) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all prospective and current Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students must be capable of performing essential functions necessary for success in both the program and the physical therapy profession. To ensure students are prepared to meet the academic and clinical demands of the DPT program, the following Essential Functions and Technical Standards define the non-academic criteria that all students must be able to meet, either independently or with reasonable accommodation. These functions align with the accreditation standards established by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education.

Students who wish to request accommodations must do so through Arcadia University's Office of Disability Support Services. Reasonable accommodations will be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is important to note that while accommodations may be approved in the academic setting, clinical sites are not obligated to provide the same level of support. As such, an accommodation deemed reasonable in the classroom may not be feasible in a clinical environment. Students with questions regarding accommodations are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Support Services at accessibility@arcadia.edu.

Students must be able to perform the following **essential functions**, with or without reasonable accommodation:

- Attend and participate in classes and clinical education for 40 hours or more per week during each academic semester, and may include early mornings, late evenings, weekends, and holidays. The typical day is longer than 8 hours. Classes consist of a combination of lectures, discussion, laboratory, and clinical activities.

- Learn, apply, interpret, and integrate information in didactic class sessions, laboratories, experiential learning, and clinic environments.
- Gather information from and about patients using appropriate affective and interpersonal behaviors, observation and communication skills, motor and sensory functions, and cognitive skills.
- Carry out physical examination and treatment procedures using observational, motor, and sensory skills.
- Demonstrate interpersonal skills to make them effective physical therapists in a healthcare team environment and with patients.
- Demonstrate the ability to maintain the safety of themselves, their patients, and their environment.
- Provide direct patient care independently, including clinical patient communication, without the aid of an intermediary for the execution of clinical services.
- Demonstrate the ability to effectively use clinical reasoning and make sound decisions in real-time, often within constrained timeframes. The practice of physical therapy frequently requires timely judgments in dynamic environments, where delays could compromise patient care or safety. Therefore, students must be able to assess, interpret, and respond to clinical information efficiently and accurately, particularly in situations that demand prompt action.

To accomplish these essential functions, students must meet the following ***technical standards***, with or without reasonable accommodation:

I. Affective/Behavioral Skills

- Respect and Professionalism:
 - Appreciate cultural, social, and individual differences.
 - Understand how personal values affect perceptions and relationships.
 - Maintain appropriate hygiene, health, and behaviors to protect the safety of oneself, patients, and others.

- Maintain respectful working relationships with peers, faculty, professional colleagues, other health care professionals, patients/clients, family members, and the public.
- Actively collaborate with other professionals to optimize patient outcomes.
- **Adaptability and Emotional Control:**
 - Manage stress and adapt to rapidly changing environments
 - Demonstrate emotional stability and maturity in stressful and unpredictable environments.
 - Demonstrate the ability to multitask and/or maintain focus in a distracting environment.
 - Adapt to differences in patients' and colleagues' communication styles as needed for effective relationships.
 - Function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the clinical problems of patients/clients.
 - Remain timely and achieve setting-specific productivity standards.
- **Professionalism and Ethical Practice:**
 - Exhibit accountability, compassion, empathy, integrity, responsibility, and collaboration.
 - Accept feedback and modify behaviors accordingly.
 - Practice physical therapy ethically and with moral reasoning.
- **Self-Reflection/Assessment and Development:**
 - Reflect on strengths and weaknesses, take initiative, and function well within a healthcare team.
 - Reflect on and address areas of professional weakness for effective patient care and collegial relationship management.
- **Mental Health:**
 - Maintain emotional stability and manage stress to support safe, compassionate, and effective patient care. This includes but is not limited to using self-reflection, setting appropriate boundaries, and seeking help when needed to promote personal health and professional growth.
- **Equal Access to Care and Professional Standards**
 - Demonstrate the ability to provide equal access to consistent, high-quality physical therapy services for all patients and clients.
 - Maintain consistent professional standards of care that do not vary based on patient characteristics.
 - Apply clinical reasoning and evidence-based practice equally across all patient populations.
 - Recognize and address barriers to care that may impede a patient's/client's ability to participate fully in their care.
 - Demonstrate the ability to provide effective communication and reasonable modifications to practice when necessary to accommodate individual patient needs, in accordance with professional standards and legal requirements.

II. Cognitive Skills

- **Intellectual and Decision-Making Ability:**
 - Analyze, integrate, and synthesize patient and environmental information to make clinical decisions for diagnosis, treatment, and management of various patient populations.
 - Apply knowledge of clinical, social, and natural sciences under supervision.
 - Acknowledge knowledge limitations and communicate those limitations to ensure safe patient care.
 - Perform and interpret tests and measures commonly used in Physical Therapist practice, as described in the Guide to Physical Therapist Practice.

- Provide a reasoned explanation for likely diagnoses.
- Information Integration:
 - Retain and apply knowledge efficiently for clinical decision-making.
 - Acquire information from written documents, films, slides, video, audio, or other media.
 - Build upon current knowledge based on information presented in clinical format, classroom settings, hands on practice, reading or research.
 - Recognize knowledge gaps and seek guidance to reduce and eliminate gaps.
- Resource Utilization
 - Recognize financial barriers and limitations to patient care and adjust plan of care accordingly.
- Evidence-Based Practice:
 - Critically evaluate and apply current research evidence to inform clinical decision-making and patient/client management.
 - Establish physical therapy plans of care that are safe, effective, patient/client-centered, and evidence-based.
 - Select and perform examination procedures and interventions that are supported by best available evidence.
 - Integrate evidence with clinical expertise and patient/client values/preferences when making clinical decisions.
 - Identify and access appropriate resources to support evidence-based practice.
 - Recognize when evidence is limited or conflicting and apply sound clinical reasoning in such situations.

III. Communication Skills

- Communicate effectively and efficiently with all members of the health care team in oral and written English.
- Express and articulate ideas and give/receive feedback clearly.
- Establish rapport and communicate effectively with patients, faculty, and healthcare teams.
- Utilize facial expressions and other non-verbal cues that match the tone of the conversation.
- Maintain a physical presence that demonstrates both collaboration and safety.
- Utilize active listening strategies.
- Accurately describe changes in mood, activity, posture and biomechanics.
- Demonstrate appropriate interpersonal skills as needed for productive classroom discussion, respectful interaction with classmates and faculty, and development of appropriate therapist to patient/client relationships.
- In emergency and potentially unsafe situations, understand and convey information for the safe and effective care of patient/clients in a clear, unambiguous and rapid fashion including receiving and understanding input from multiple sources simultaneously or in rapid-fire sequence.
- Record information and complete assignments accurately.
- Produce legible and intelligible communication/documentation that clearly conveys the necessary information.
- Complete documentation forms according to directions, in a timely manner, including manual, electronic and other recording methods.
- Use appropriate techniques like attending, clarifying, and coaching to interact with patients and colleagues.

- Perceive verbal as well as nonverbal communications, and promptly respond to emotional communications (sadness, worry, agitation, confusion).

IV. Observation Skills

- Abilities:
 - Incorporate visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory observations into patient assessment.
 - Monitor patient status and environmental cues.
 - Observe and interpret nonverbal cues and patient responses accurately at a distance and close at hand.
 - Observe anatomic structures, skin integrity including skin color, texture, odors, bony landmarks, anatomical/pathological structures.
 - Observe and detect the various signs and symptoms of disease processes and movement dysfunction.
 - Discriminate numbers and findings with diagnostic instruments, tests and measures.

V. Psychomotor and Sensory Skills

- Health Status:
 - Maintain adequate health to perform the essential functions.
 - Respond to emergencies and provide physical assistance when necessary.
- Gross and Fine Motor Skills:
 - Perform physical tasks **repeatedly and frequently**, including but not limited to sitting, standing, bending, twisting, lifting, transferring and positioning patients, squatting, kneeling, crawling, reaching, pushing/pulling, grasping, walking, stair climbing, and movement of the trunk and neck in all directions while providing care in practice and clinical settings.
 - Constantly lift >25 pounds, frequently lift >50 pounds, and occasionally lift >100 pounds.
 - Demonstrate manual dexterity for palpation, joint mobilization, and handling equipment.
 - Handle equipment with strength, fine motor control, and coordination.
 - Provide general care and emergency medical care such as airway management, handling of catheters, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, application of pressure to control bleeding, infection control procedures.
 - Not hinder the ability of co-workers to provide prompt care.
- Endurance:
 - Assume and sustain physical activity such as sitting, standing, bending, lifting, squatting, kneeling, reaching, walking, and stair climbing, for extended periods as required in laboratory and clinical settings to provide safe and appropriate patient care.
 - Function at a high level in the face of long hours and a high stress environment.
- Sensory Abilities:
 - Use visual, auditory, and tactile perception to:
 - Observe and assess patients and treatment equipment.
 - Effectively gather auscultation and auditory data, such as heart and breath sounds, pulses, joint noises, blood pressure, gait and prosthetic sounds.
 - Assess and respond appropriately to environmental cues (e.g., alarms).
 - Detect signs of infection or injury through visual, olfactory, and tactile feedback.

Resources:

1. Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. Standards and Required Elements for Accreditation of Physical Therapist Education Programs, adopted 10/31/2023.
<https://www.captonline.org/globalassets/capte-docs/2024-capte-pt-standards-required-elements.pdf>. Accessed 4/15/2024.
2. Bureau of Labor Statistics Strength Level Fact Sheet. Accessed 4/6/2025.
<https://www.bls.gov/ors/factsheet/strength.htm>
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 4.0. Accessed 4/2/2025. <https://guide.apta.org/>
5. American Physical Therapy Association. Academy of Education. Accessed 4/8/2025.
<https://www.aptaeducation.org/>
6. Montgomery County Community College Essential Functions and Program Specifications Physical Therapy Assistant Program. <https://www.mc3.edu/degrees-and-programs/programs/health/assets/physical-therapist-assistant/docs/physical-therapist-assistant-essential-functions.pdf>. Accessed 4/9/25
7. University of Puget Sound School of Physical Therapy Technical Standards.
https://www.pugetsound.edu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Clinical%20Education%20Manual%202022-23_Aug2022.pdf. Accessed 4/9/2025.