



DPT Program Technical Standards and Essential Functions

(Adapted 03/01 from the U. of Colorado PT program and others, with permission; revised 05/11; 08/15; 04/17; 06/19; 07/20)

I. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to delineate cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills, abilities, and behaviors deemed essential for completion of the program and to perform as a competent generalist physical therapist. The following list included is illustrative and does not represent an all-encompassing listing of the functions of a physical therapist.

The intent of the professional program at SBU is to educate competent generalist physical therapists who can provide examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention. Treatment interventions for the general population primarily occur in sub-acute and rehabilitation facilities or in outpatient centers in the current health care system. Enrolled students are required to complete the academic and clinical components of the professional DPT program, as defined in the SBU Catalog, DPT program Handbooks and the various course syllabi.

Technical Standards

It is during the rigorous three-year curriculum that the student develops the qualities needed to practice physical therapy. Students acquire the foundation of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors needed beginning in a professional education program and continue development throughout the physical therapist's professional career. Those abilities which physical therapist must possess to practice safely are reflected in the technical standards that follow.

In order to evaluate competence, the Physical Therapy Program employs periodic examination, both written and practical, as an essential component of the curriculum. Successful completion of these examinations is required of all students as a condition of continued progress through the curriculum. Reasonable accommodation will be made in the form of administration of the evaluation when necessary. Students must be able to integrate all information received by whatever sense(s) employed, consistently, quickly, and accurately, and they must have the intellectual ability to learn, integrate, analyze and synthesize data.

The process of evaluation of the clinical performance of the student is an integral and essential component of the curriculum. Although reasonable accommodation can be made, participation in clinical experiences away from campus and the evaluation of the participation is required. Students, to be successfully placed in a clinical rotation must not only meet the technical standards of the SBU DPT Program, but also whatever standards are in place by the clinical facility. The Clinical Performance Instrument (CPI) is the evaluation tool currently used by the program.

II. Specific Areas of Standards and Essential Functions

Candidates for the degree must be able to meet these minimum standards and be in compliance with legal and ethical standards as set forth by the APTA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. There are no substitutes associated with the standards for these essential skills. The applicant must be able to perform the skills throughout their matriculation in the program, with or without reasonable accommodation, for successful completion of degree requirements.



A. Observation

Observation involves the functional use of vision, hearing, smell and somatic sensations.

Standard: A student must be able to observe lectures, laboratory dissection of cadavers, lecture and laboratory demonstrations, and observe microscopic studies of tissues.

Essential Functions: The student must be able to observe a patient accurately, observe digital and waveform readings and other graphic images to determine a patient's condition. Examples in which these observational skills are required include, but are not limited to: palpation of peripheral pulses, bony prominences and ligamentous structures; visual and tactile evaluation for areas of inflammation, gait analysis, ECG readings, radiographic images; visual and tactile assessment of the presence and degree of edema; visual and olfactory assessment of wounds; auscultation of heart/breath sounds.

B. Communication

Demonstration of competent communication is fundamental to the career of the student.

Standard: This area includes speech, language, reading, writing and computer literacy.

Essential Functions: Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with faculty, staff, clients, and patients to elicit information regarding expectations, behavior, mood and activities, as well as perceive non-verbal communications. Students must also be able to communicate effectively and efficiently with other members of the health care community to convey information essential for safe and effective care. Students need to communicate with individuals in a culturally sensitive way, while accepting individual differences. Students must be able to read, write, speak, and understand English at a level consistent with successful course completion.

C. Motor

Motor skills require coordination of both gross and fine muscular movement, equilibrium, and the integrated use of touch, vision and smell.

Standard: Students must possess sufficient motor function to elicit information from the patient examination and provide therapeutic interventions, by palpation, auscultation, tapping and other physical maneuvers.

Essential Functions: Students must be able to execute movements required to provide general and therapeutic interventions, including, but are not limited to: positioning large or immobile patients, provide balance and safety support during movement tasks, gait training using therapeutic aids and orthotics/prosthetics, positioning, performing manual mobilization techniques, performing non-surgical wound debridement, and placing electrodes.

D. Intellectual-Conceptual Integrative and Quantitative Abilities

These abilities include measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, judgment, numerical recognition and synthesis.

Standard: Problem solving and critical thinking, key skills demanded of a physical therapist, requires all of these intellectual abilities. These abilities must be performed quickly, especially in emergency situations.

Essential Functions: Students must be able to identify significant findings from history, physical examination, and laboratory data, provide a reasoned explanation for likely therapy, recalling and



retaining information in an efficient and timely manner. The ability to incorporate new information from peers, teachers, and the professional literature in formulating treatment and plans is essential. Sound judgment in patient assessment, diagnostic and therapeutic planning is essential; students must be able to identify and communicate the limits of their knowledge to others when appropriate. Students must be able to interpret graphs describing biologic relationships and manage other similar modes of data.

E. Behavioral and Social Attributes

As a component of their education, students must demonstrate ethical behavior, and recognize the psycho-social impact of body function and structure impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions; and integrate the needs of the patient and family into the plan of care, including education.

Standard: A student must possess the psychological stability required for the full utilization of their intellectual abilities, for the exercise of sound judgment, for the prompt completions of all responsibilities inherent to diagnosis and care of patients/clients, and for the development of mature, sensitive, and effective professional behaviors (as defined in DPT student handbook) and relationships with patients, clients, educators, colleagues, and other health care providers.

Essential Functions: Students must be able to tolerate physically and mentally taxing workloads and function effectively under stress. They must be able to adapt to a changing healthcare environment, and display flexibility as they learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the clinical environment.

III. Reasonable Accommodation

It is the policy of the Southwest Baptist University Physical Therapy Program to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified students with a disability so long as it does not fundamentally alter the nature of the program offered and does not impose an undue hardship.

If a student cannot meet or demonstrate the above listed essential functions and technical standards, it is the responsibility of the student to request appropriate accommodation(s). Whether or not any requested accommodation is reasonable will be determined on an individual basis. Determining what is reasonable accommodation is an interactive process which the candidate should initiate with the DPT Program Director, in advance. The disability services of the university will provide critical support in the determination process based off of documented needs of the student.

Prospective students, who can complete these tasks and activities with or without reasonable accommodation, are not required to disclose the specifics of their disability prior to an admission decision. Upon admission, a student who discloses a disability must complete the Disclosure of Disability Form and may receive reasonable accommodation(s) as determined above, but must be able to perform the essential functions of the curriculum and meet the standards described herein by the SBU PT program. It is also recognized that the status of students may change over time in which accommodations may need to be made, removed, or altered based on the changing status of the student. The student retains the right to update their disability of disclosure status and seek accommodations at any point during their tenure in the program.