

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Physical Therapy



Background on Physical Therapy Programs

A physical therapist is a healthcare professional who helps people improve movement and manage pain, often after an injury or illness. They use various techniques to help patients restore function, reduce pain, and prevent future injury. Physical therapists examine, diagnose, and treat individuals of all ages. They practice in a wide range of settings, including hospitals, outpatient clinics, people's homes, schools, sports and fitness facilities, workplaces, and nursing homes.

To practice as a physical therapist in the US, you must earn a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree from a program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy and then pass a state licensure exam. DPT programs are highly competitive (~5-10% acceptance rate). They are typically three-year programs, starting in the summer. Approximately 77% of the DPT program is classroom (didactic) and lab study, and the remaining 23% is dedicated to clinical education. Physical therapy students spend an average of 22 weeks in the final clinical experience. Most programs accept students on a rolling admissions schedule, and the applications open in July. This means that programs review applications and fill the incoming cohort as applications are received; students who apply to the program earlier have a competitive advantage for gaining admission. There are 294 accredited physical therapy programs in the United States (a list of schools in the United States can be found at: <https://ptcasdirectory.apta.org/>).

Pre-Requisite Coursework

Each DPT program has their own pre-requisite course requirements, so make sure that you consult each school's website in advance so that you can organize your coursework as appropriate. The table below provides a summary of required courses that you can use as a general framework.

Courses	DPT Prerequisites
BIO 103/104: General Biology 1 & 2	All DPT programs require BIO 103 Most DPT programs require BIO 104
BIO 105/106: Anatomy & Physiology 1 & 2	All DPT programs require both
CHE 110/111: General Chemistry 1 & 2	All DPT programs require both
PHY 120/121: General Physics 1 & 2	All DPT programs require both
MAT 120: Elementary Statistics	All DPT programs require
Precalc or Higher MAT (MAT 133 or MAT 181 suggested)	All DPT programs require
PSY 100: Intro to Psychology	All DPT programs require
PSY Electives: 3-6 Credits	Most DPT programs require Developmental psychology recommended
HPX 314: Exercise Physiology	Recommended. Some DPT programs require
HPX 318: Exercise Kinesiology	Recommended. Some DPT programs require

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Recommended Undergraduate Degree Programs:

Students can choose any undergraduate degree major they wish and still apply to a DPT program as long as they complete the prerequisite coursework required to apply. Many students pursuing DPT programs choose to declare the following majors at WCSU, as degree requirements align with completion of DPT prerequisite coursework: BS in Public Health, Allied Health or BS in Biology.

WCSU Articulation Agreement:

The WCSU Health Promotion and Exercise Sciences (HPX) department has an on-going articulation agreement with The University of Hartford (UHart) DPT program. UHart has agreed to reserve 4 seats in each year's DPT admissions cohort for students who graduate from the BS in Public Health, Allied Health program at WCSU. To be eligible, students must meet prerequisite coursework with a 3.2 or higher GPA, complete the public health internship in a physical therapy setting, and they must apply directly to the UHart DPT program. The application fee will be waived for these students. Minimum GPA: Most DPT programs have a minimum grade point average requirement of 3.0-3.2 out of 4.0. The average GPA for students admitted to a DPT program is 3.4 and above. Most DPT programs will not accept a grade of below B- on a prerequisite course.

Pre-Requisite Physical Therapy Experience

Most DPT programs require applicants to have volunteer or paid experience working with patients under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist. The program may specify the settings and types of experiences required (outpatient vs. inpatient). Applicants may also be required to have a licensed physical therapist verify the experiential hours.

Entrance Exams

Some DPT schools have no required entrance examination but virtually all require a bachelor's degree.

Some schools require the GRE (Graduate Record Examination). It's a standardized test that is about 2 hours long. The GRE tests your writing, reading, vocabulary, math, and logic skills - and also will test your decision making and carefulness. You can take official GRE practice tests at the ETS (the test provider) website. ETS offers two free practice tests and some paid ones as well. The website where you find the practice tests is <https://www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/prepare/powerprep.html>

Other Application Requirements

Other requirements for applying to DPT programs include the following:

1. Letters of Recommendation: Typically 1-4 letters, and they must be from a combination of licensed physical therapists and academic advisors/professors
2. Personal Essay: These are specific to each program you apply to. Many programs have supplemental essays as well.
3. Interview: DPT programs may require competitive applicants to visit the campus for a formal interview. Applicants may be required to speak with a single faculty member, a student, a physical therapist, a panel of interviewers, or participate in an orientation session.
4. Criminal Background Check: DPT programs may ask applicants to disclose any previous felony or misdemeanor convictions as part of the application process. DPT programs may require criminal background checks and/or drug tests in order to verify an individual's suitability to participate in experiential education rotations, to confirm a student's eligibility for licensure, and to ensure patient safety.

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PTA Before PT

Physical therapy assistant (PTA) programs are not considered to be a stepping stone to a DPT education. The PTA curriculum is an Associates Degree, and it does not provide the prerequisites for a DPT program. Fewer than 2% of DPT students were previously PTA's.

Application Process

Most, but not all professional DPT programs participate in the Physical Therapy Central Application System (PTCAS). Applicants who wish to apply to nonparticipating PTCAS programs must apply directly to the institution using the DPT program's local application. A list of participating and non-participating can be found in the PTCAS Program Directory (<https://www.apta.org/cas/ptcas>).

For the 2026 CASPA application cycle, the initial application processing fee was \$170. After that, each DPT application costs \$70. Applicants are required to create only one PTCAS account to apply to all PTCAS programs to which they are interested in applying. All information about creating an account, application requirements, and deadlines for applications submitted through PTCAS can be found through the PTCAS website: <https://www.apta.org/cas/ptcas/application-prep>.

Application Timeline

The timeline for applying to DPT programs can vary by program for non PTCAS participating schools. Make sure to check the institution's website for specific application deadlines. The PTCAS application cycle is adjusted each year, and the specific timeline can be found on the PTCAS website, but the application cycle typically follows the schedule outlined below:

- June: PTCAS Application Cycle Opens for the DPT cohort starting the following year
- September: Fall APTA Doctor of Physical Therapy Virtual Fair
- December: Academic Update Opens
- February: Academic Update Closes

Helpful Websites

www.apta.org: American Physical Therapy Association

<https://www.apta.org/cas/ptcas>: PTCAS Website

<https://ptcasdirectory.apta.org/>: PTCAS Program Directory