ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAM

**Introduction**

In addition to meeting academic standards required for admission into, retention, and graduation from the Physical Therapy Program, students must also acquire and maintain certain essential functions that are necessary to the practice of physical therapy. Essential Functions are the academic, clinical, physical, and interpersonal aptitudes and abilities that allow physical therapy students to complete the professional curriculum and to practice in a clinical setting safely, ethically and competently following graduation. These essential functions are necessary to perform the clinical skills consistent with physical therapy practice as outlined by the APTA’s Guide to Physical Therapist Practice. Essential Functions apply in the classroom, tutorial, laboratory, and clinical settings.

It is the responsibility of the faculty to ensure, to the best of their ability, that students and graduates of the Wayne State University Physical Therapy Program are capable of safely interacting with patients. Patient safety is, therefore, a major consideration when establishing essential function standards for admission to and continuation in the program.

The essential functions outlined below have been formulated based on the mission, philosophy, and goals of the Program and the University; the guidelines of the Commission on Accreditation for Physical Therapy Education of the American Physical Therapy Association; the Generic Abilities as outlined by May, et. al. (1995); the Clinical Performance Instrument of the American Physical Therapy Association (1999); the Guide to Physical Therapy Practice (APTA, 1997); and the Normative Model of Physical Therapist Education (APTA, 1997).

**Policy**

The Wayne State University Physical Therapy Program adheres to high standards in all areas to select and maintain graduate students who have the ability to become highly competent professionals. The entry level program at Wayne State University prepares students to enter the profession as generalist practitioners. Therefore, students must meet the academic, clinical, educational, and essential functions requirements that will allow them to practice physical therapy safely and ethically.

The essential function standards are based on the guidelines outlined in the accreditation standards of the Commission on Accreditation of the American Physical Therapy Association. Within these guidelines, the faculty of the Physical Therapy Program has the academic discretion and responsibility for the selection and retention of students. Both admissions and retention decisions are based on academic standards that will ensure that graduates can successfully and safely carry out the essential functions required for graduation and physical therapy practice.

**Essential Functions**

*Academic Aptitudes / Abilities*

The student must have the cognitive abilities to master relevant content in basic science and clinical courses at a level deemed appropriate by the faculty. Students must be able to comprehend, memorize, analyze, synthesize, and apply information and skills. Students must have the ability to master this information which may be presented in course work in the form of lectures, written material, projected images, Internet based and multimedia instruction. He or she must be able to discern and comprehend dimensional and spatial relationships of structures, and be able to develop reasoning, critical thinking, and clinical decision making skills appropriate to the competent practice of physical therapy.

*Clinical Aptitudes / Abilities*

Students must be able to make clinical judgments based on data gathered during the examination and evaluation process and must be able to carry out any necessary interventions as outlined in the Guide to Physical Therapy Practice. A major component of physical therapy practice is the assessment and management of movement disorders, including those related to neuromuscular, musculoskeletal and cardiopulmonary dysfunction, as well as combined state disorders. Students must, therefore, have the ability to observe any problems with movement related to these systems. They must be capable of perceiving (i.e., through a physical examination and evaluation) signs and symptoms of disease and disability. Students must be able to obtain information through observation and palpation of the body, through palpable changes in the various organs and tissues, and through auditory information (e.g., patient voice, heart sounds, and respiratory sounds). The student must also have the ability to discern changes in skin, subcutaneous masses, muscles, bones, joints and joint structures, and intra-abdominal structures (e.g., liver and spleen) that may be contributing to a movement disorder. In summary, the student must possess sufficient visual, auditory, and tactile sensation, as well as motor, and cognitive skills to perceive the presence of abnormalities of all systems that may contribute to movement disorders and be able to complete physical therapy examinations, and evaluations, as well as provide purposeful and skilled interventions through the use of visual auditory and tactile input.

*Physical Aptitudes / Abilities*

Because the management of movement disorders is a major component of physical therapy practice, the student must have the ability, within reasonable limits, to assist a patient in moving (e.g., from a chair to a bed, or from a wheelchair to a commode). The student must also have the ability to move him or herself and the patient in three-dimensional space in order to perform motor function tests and provide purposeful and skilled interventions. Additionally, the student must be able to ensure the physical safety of the patient at all times, including measures related to basic life sustaining knowledge and skills, such as CPR and first aid.

*Interpersonal Aptitudes / Abilities*

The student must be able to communicate effectively with patients, their families, groups in the community, and members of the health care team. Effective communication skills include the ability to obtain accurate and complete information from a patient or family member and to process this information in order to seek follow-up information and be able to relay the findings to others in both written and oral formats. Effective communication includes the ability to take, and document an appropriate history in a patient record, to perform a thorough physical examination and evaluation, and to provide appropriate interventions. Furthermore, the student must be able to recognize and interpret nonverbal, as well as verbal, communication. The student must be an active and empathetic listener who is able to establish rapport with others in a way that promotes concern and sensitivity to potential social, cultural, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual differences. Finally, in the area of communication, students must be aware of limitations in his or her knowledge and have the ability to make appropriate judgments about when to seek guidance, supervision, or consultation from a colleague, supervisor, health care provider (e.g., physician or nurse practitioner) or members of a multidisciplinary care team. Students must be able to understand and demonstrate ethical physical therapy practice, including principles of empathy, concern, responsibility for their actions, professionalism, and integrity with colleagues and patients. Students must be emotionally stable, flexible, able to work as part of a team, and able to manage stress in the demanding and changing health care environment.

Students must exhibit characteristics that do not compromise the health and safety of themselves, clients, or coworkers. This includes adherence to universal precautions and OSHA requirements for blood-borne pathogens and following professional and legal guidelines for disclosing information to others regarding their own health status. Students must further exhibit characteristics that do not compromise privacy of clients; including ethical and legal compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA).

**Students with Disabilities**

Otherwise qualified students with disabilities (as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act) may be entitled to reasonable accommodations. To be an otherwise qualified individual for the study of physical therapy in Wayne’s Program, students must be able to meet both our academic standards and essential professional functions, with or without reasonable accommodation. A student requesting accommodations **must do so** through Wayne State University’s Office of Student Disability Services (SDS). SDS can be contacted at 313-577-1851 or via email at [studentdisability@wayne.edu](mailto:studentdisability@wayne.edu). They are located at 5155 Gullen Mall, 1600 Undergraduate Library, Detroit, Michigan 48202. Services are by appointment only. More information is contained on their website, which is: <http://studentdisability.wayne.edu/accommodations.php>.

Accommodations and services are individualized and based upon the student’s documentation. It is for this reason that students should insure that they have sufficient documentation that supports the need for appropriate and reasonable accommodations. Accommodations and services cannot be guaranteed if students choose not to follow the procedures for registering with Student Disability Services in a timely manner. Accommodations and services can be revisited as needed, but they are not retroactive and cannot be guaranteed if procedures are not followed with reasonable, advanced notice

Students who receive accommodations need to:

* Communicate with instructors during the semester regarding accommodations and/or services
* Contact the instructor and SDS immediately if any significant course changes occur
* Inform the instructor and the SDS Disability Specialist immediately if any problems regarding accommodations and /or services occur

**The Use of Auxiliary Aids and Intermediaries**

Qualified students with documented disabilities may be provided with reasonable accommodations in the form of use of an intermediary or an auxiliary aid. Such reasonable accommodations should be designed to help the student meet learning outcomes without eliminating essential program elements or fundamentally altering the curriculum. No disability can be reasonably accommodated with an intermediary that provides cognitive support or substitutes for essential clinical skills, or supplements clinical and ethical judgment. Thus, accommodations cannot eliminate essential program elements or fundamentally alter the curriculum.