ATSU Physical Therapy Technical Standards

Introduction

The Department of Physical Therapy at A.T. Still University has a responsibility to the public to assure that its graduates are prepared to become fully competent and caring physical therapists. In order to fulfill this obligation, physical therapy students must safely and competently demonstrate the technical standards described in this document as well as in individual course requirements.

Technical standards (also called competencies) refer to the physical and mental abilities, skills, attitudes and behaviors that comprise cognitive, psychomotor, affective, and communicative domains of physical therapist practice and are required for admission, retention, and graduation. Technical standards apply to classroom, laboratories, and clinical settings. ATSU Doctor of Physical Therapy Program uses independent clinical education sites that may or may not be able to offer the same reasonable accommodations that are made available by ATSU.

A student is required to develop entry-level proficiency across all four domains (cognitive, psychomotor, affective, and communicative) to achieve satisfactory completion of the curricular requirements and to develop the qualities consistent with the profession of physical therapy. Entry-level proficiency is defined as the minimum knowledge, skills and abilities to practice independently, competently, legally, ethically, and safely as a licensed physical therapist. Students must meet all of these standards with or without reasonable academic adjustments. Students who have questions regarding academic adjustments should contact the Director-Learning Resources, 660-626-2424.

If a student cannot independently demonstrate the following competencies, it is the responsibility of the student to request an appropriate academic adjustment. The University will provide academic adjustments as long as it does not fundamentally alter the nature of the program offered and does not impose an undue hardship such as those that cause a significant expense, difficulty or are unduly disruptive to the educational process.

In order to gain admission, matriculate, and remain a student in the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at ATSU each student must be able to meet the program qualifications—including these technical standards, with or without academic adjustments. If it becomes apparent that either: a) the student cannot meet the technical standards even with academic adjustments; or b) the requested academic adjustment(s) would fundamentally alter the nature of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at ATSU or the practice of physical therapy in ATSU clinical education placements; or c) create a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of others, then an offer of admission may be withdrawn or a student may no longer be otherwise qualified for the program.

Domains
A brief description of each domain, along with a behavioral example, is provided below. These examples are representative but not all-inclusive. Additional details are outlined in individual course requirements and in the Department, the School of Allied Health and the University policies and procedures.

**Cognitive Domain**

The student must possess the cognitive abilities necessary to independently integrate information from courses in the basic, clinical, and behavioral sciences in order to problem-solve effectively during the patient/client management process. In order to achieve entry-level proficiency, students must progress from the basic skills of memorization, comprehension, and application to the advanced skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Students also must be able to measure and calculate as well as use data collected to formulate and test hypotheses. Students must have the ability to communicate proficiently in English in both written and oral forms in a timely manner under high paced stressful environments.

**Example:**

Physical therapy students must gather and integrate information pertaining to human anatomy and physiology, pathophysiology, medicine and related health care services, as well as psychosocial factors, in order to discern the nature of and to develop and implement a plan of care for a patient/client’s actual or potential impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Results of the patient/client management process must be communicated professionally orally and/or in written format with other patient care providers, patients and families.

**Physical Domain**

The student must be able to independently accomplish the physical demands of the work performed by physical therapists which are categorized as “medium” in difficulty. “Medium work” is defined as: “Exerting 20 to 50 pounds of force occasionally, or 10 to 25 pounds of force frequently, or greater than negligible up to 10 pounds of force constantly to move objects.” (Department of Labor)

The physical therapy student also must possess the physical and sensorimotor abilities (including gross motor and fine motor skills, vision, hearing, and tactile and proprioceptive awareness) to perform the patient/client management elements of examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention in a timely manner. This includes possessing the physical abilities to conduct required examination and treatment procedures and communicate with patients about the proposed physical therapy management. This requires walking, standing, bending, and lifting to assist patients, while assuring the student’s own safety as well as that of the patient. In addition, this requires the sensory skills for observational and discriminative capabilities to ensure patient and student safety.
Example:

Students must observe, inspect, palpate, test, measure, position, and assist patients/clients with movement in order to determine the extent of, and intervene with, a patient/client’s actual or potential impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.

Successful demonstration of psychomotor skills requires physical therapy students to:

1. complete a task within a specified timeframe that is consistent with actual clinical practice in physical therapy. Actual clinical practice is determined through input from current practicing physical therapists who serve as clinical instructors or as advisors to the program. Time allotments are defined for each course, where relevant, by the:
   a. amount of time to execute the psychomotor skill (i.e., set the patient up, calibrate the equipment, apply the equipment, instruct the patient, perform the technique, remove the equipment, etc.)
   b. amount of time to perform the overall activity or task (i.e., read the chart, discuss the situation with the patient or instructor, answer questions prior to and at the conclusion of the performance of a psychomotor skill, complete necessary documentation)
2. demonstrate the physical capacity (i.e., balance, strength, flexibility) to safely position him or herself prior to assisting a patient/client with movement.
3. demonstrate the physical capacity (i.e., balance, strength, flexibility) to safely position the patient/client prior to treatment and to assist (i.e., manually guide or lift) the patient/client, as indicated, with:
   a. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
   b. Balance, coordination, flexibility, strength and functional exercises
   c. Positioning
   d. Movement in bed
   e. Transfers from one surface to another
   f. Ambulation on various surfaces
   g. Stair climbing
   h. Wheelchair mobility

Affective Domain

Students in the Department of Physical Therapy must be able to independently demonstrate attributes of empathy, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interest, and self-motivation, as such qualities are assessed not only during the admissions process but throughout physical therapy education. Students must be able to exercise sound judgment, complete the responsibilities attendant to the evaluation and care of patients, and develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients. Students must be able to adapt to ever-changing environments, display flexibility, respect individual differences and learn to function in the face of uncertainties and stresses that are inherent in the educational process, as well as the clinical
problems of many patients. Acknowledge and respect individual values and opinions in order to foster harmonious working relationships with colleagues, peers, and patients/clients.

Communicative Domain:

Physical Therapy students must be able to independently speak, hear, and observe patients in order to obtain information, distinguish nonverbal communications, sense changes in mood, communicate effectively, and instruct patients and their families. Students must be able to communicate quickly and effectively in oral and written English and electronically with all members of the health care team.

Example:

Physical therapy students must effectively inform and educate patients/clients, and other health care providers, regarding the consequences of actual or potential impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.

Statement of Agreement

I have read the above document and have sought clarification where needed. I understand that I must pass, with or without reasonable accommodation, all four domains that comprise the technical standards, in order to be qualified for admission, promoted to the subsequent terms, and to achieve eligibility for graduation from the professional physical therapy program.