

Utah Valley University

Physical Therapist Assistant Program

Technical Standards for Physical Therapist Assistant Students

Students applying to the Utah Valley University (UVU) Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) Program should be aware of the essential requirements necessary for success in the classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings. The PTA is a licensed health care paraprofessional who provides interventions under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist following the therapist's evaluation and plan of care.

These standards outline the fundamental abilities expected of all UVU PTA students to ensure safe and effective participation in the program. They represent program expectations for admission, progression, and graduation and do not necessarily reflect every condition of employment after graduation.

The UVU PTA curriculum is designed to prepare graduates for safe, competent, entry-level practice across a variety of health care environments. All students are held to the minimum criteria established by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) and the UVU PTA Program.

The program upholds the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ensuring access for qualified applicants. Students requiring accommodations must still be able to meet the essential requirements, with or without reasonable accommodations, in order to complete the program.

In adopting these standards, the UVU PTA Program affirms its responsibility to safeguard the patient's right to safe, competent, and high-quality care delivered by students and graduates.

BEHAVIOR SKILLS

Candidate must be able to exercise sound judgment, form empathetic and therapeutic relationships, and tolerate close physical contact with a wide and diverse range of individuals. This includes interaction with classmates, faculty, lab partners, patients, and families across all ages, races, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, as well as individuals with obesity, physical differences, chronic illness, or mental health challenges. These abilities include, but are not limited to:

1. **Demonstrating appropriate interpersonal skills** and fostering cooperative, respectful, and collegial relationships with peers, faculty, health care professionals, patients, and families—even when managing multiple individuals simultaneously.
2. **Working effectively under stress**, including with medically or emotionally unstable patients, during rapid changes in patient status, or in situations requiring CPR or other emergency responses.
3. **Managing both physical demands and emotional stressors** associated with academic, laboratory, and clinical environments.
4. **Prioritizing tasks, integrating information, and making safe and effective decisions** in fast-paced or unpredictable situations, while showing flexibility, resilience, and professional coping strategies.

COGNITIVE SKILLS

Candidate must demonstrate sufficient skills in calculation, reasoning, critical thinking, and judgment to process information and make decisions within the time frame of physical therapy sessions. They must be able to organize, prioritize, and manage responsibilities efficiently. These abilities include, but are not limited to:

1. **Collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data** from written, verbal, and observed sources related to patient status and care.

2. **Prioritizing and managing multiple tasks**, integrating information, and making sound, timely decisions in both academic and clinical settings.
3. **Observing, measuring, and interpreting patient responses**—both normal and abnormal—to physical therapy interventions, and adjusting treatment procedures as needed for safety and effectiveness.
4. **Acting in a safe, ethical, and professional manner** in the classroom, laboratory, and clinical environments.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Candidate must be able to use clear and effective communication in the English language with peers, faculty, patients and their families, and members of the health care team. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. **Reading ability** at a level that supports safe performance of responsibilities, such as interpreting handwritten chart notes, printed instructions, or equipment manuals.
2. **Expressing and interpreting information** accurately about a patient's condition, safety, and rehabilitation needs.
3. **Verbal and written communication** with patients, families, health care providers, community members, and reimbursement sources in a professional manner.
4. **Use of technology and electronic documentation systems** to communicate and record information effectively.
5. **Recognition and interpretation of nonverbal communication**, including body language, tone, and facial expression, and responding appropriately.

MOTOR SKILLS

Candidate must have sufficient motor capabilities and strength to execute the movements and skills required to provide safe and effective physical therapy interventions. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Coordination, speed and agility to assist and safely guard (protect) patients who are walking, exercising, or performing other rehabilitation activities.

2. **Capacity to move, lift, carry, or position patients and equipment**, including pushing or pulling as needed in the clinical environment.
 - a. Able to lift up to 60 pounds
 - b. Able to push/pull up to 50 pounds at waist level
 - c. Stand 1-6 hours with lab time blocks up to 3 hours
 - d. Sit 2-5 hours per day with lecture blocks up to 3 hours.
3. **Ability to assist, guide, resist, or provide emergency care** for patients, which may require extended periods (up to 90 minutes) of bending, standing, kneeling, sitting, walking, or crawling without rest.
4. Ability to perform—with safe and proper body mechanics—the transfer and gait training techniques used during physical therapy interventions with patients.
5. Ability and dexterity to manipulate devices and treat patients in physical therapy, which may involve adjusting gauges, dials, small nuts/bolts, equipment settings, etc.
6. Ability to administer CPR.

SENSORY SKILLS

Candidate must have the ability to observe, gather, and apply information during demonstrations and in physical measures performed on patients. This includes obtaining essential data in classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings through **observation, auscultation, palpation, and related methods**. These abilities include, but are not limited to:

1. **Visual ability** (with correction if needed) to recognize a patient's physiological status, interpret facial expressions and body language, distinguish between normal and abnormal movement patterns, read or set parameters on physical therapy equipment, identify changes in skin color, and assess the safety of the environment.
2. **Auditory ability** (with correction if needed) to understand voices, even when protective equipment is worn; respond to equipment alarms or calls for assistance within at least 10 feet; and accurately measure vital signs in a variety of clinical environments.
3. **Tactile ability** to palpate pulses and detect differences in skin texture, temperature, body contour, muscle tone, and joint mobility.

4. **Proprioceptive and balance awareness** sufficient to safely assist and guard patients while they are walking, exercising, or performing other rehabilitation activities.

CLINICAL REQUIREMENTS

The PTA Program includes supervised clinical rotations in which students provide physical therapy interventions under the direction of licensed physical therapists and/or physical therapist assistants. Students must have the capacity to complete **full-time clinical schedules**, which typically include **eight-hour days and 40-hour weeks** in a variety of practice settings.

Clinical education is designed as an integrative measure of a student's knowledge, skills, and professional behaviors. During these experiences, students are expected to consistently demonstrate the **abilities of an entry-level physical therapist assistant**, including safe, effective, and ethical practice in patient care.

ACCESSIBILITY

Students who have concerns about the ability to perform any of these functions should contact the PTA Program Director at (801) 863-6313. Individuals with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations or information by calling the UVU Accessibility Services at (801) 863-8747. Or online at:

<https://www.uvu.edu/accessibility-services/accommodations/index.html>