



# Pre-Physical Therapy

## Advisement

### Nature of the Work, Earnings and Occupational Outlook

Physical Therapists are dynamic health professionals who provide clinical expertise in the restoration, maintenance and promotion of optimal physical function. Physical Therapists evaluate and treat people of all ages with movement disorders and other health problems resulting from diseases, disorders, conditions or injuries. The treatment goals of Physical Therapists include making patients stronger, relieving their pain, helping them to regain and maintain maximum human performance, and educating patients on proper health maintenance. Treatment may include therapeutic exercise, cardiovascular endurance training, and training in activities of daily living.

Physical Therapists are employed in hospitals, private physical therapy offices, community health centers, industrial health centers, sports facilities, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, home health agencies, schools, research institutions, or teach in colleges or universities. They work with other health care providers such as physicians, occupational therapists, nurses, mental health professionals, and speech pathologists and audiologists. In 2006, about 173,000 physical therapists practiced in the U.S. (Occupational Outlook Handbook 20082009.) According to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), the median salary for a physical therapist in May of 2006 was \$66,200 depending on position, years of experience, degree of education, geographic location, and practice setting.

To obtain licensure and practice in the US requires graduation from an accredited professional physical therapy graduate program and that graduates pass the national licensure exam. The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) accredits Physical therapy programs. All accredited entry-level physical therapy programs are at the master's level (MS or MPT) or doctorate level (DPT). Most programs require two to three years of education including didactic work and clinical training in various health care settings. Physical Therapy graduate course work investigates questions related to body movement, simple and complex motor skill development, and the effects of therapeutic activity. Research in the field focuses on understanding the impairments underlying disability, or applications for practical clinical problems.

### Physical Therapy Education

As of February 2009, there are 211 accredited programs, 15 of which offer MS or MPT degrees and 196 offering DPT degrees. APTA's vision is that by the year 2020, the majority of Physical Therapists in practice will possess a DPT. "The rationale for awarding the DPT is based on the fact that 1) PT practice requires considerable breadth and depth in educational preparation, a breadth and depth not easily acquired within the time constraints of the typical MPT program; 2) societal expectations that the fully autonomous healthcare practitioner with a scope of practice consistent with the *Guide to Physical Therapist Practice* be a clinical doctor; 3) the realization of the profession's goals in the coming decades, including direct access, "physician status" for reimbursement purposes, and clinical competence consistent with the preferred outcomes of evidence-based practice, will require that practitioners possess the clinical doctorate (consistent with medicine, osteopathy, dentistry, veterinary medicine, optometry, and podiatry); and 4) many existing professional (entry-level) MPT programs already meet the requirements for the clinical doctorate; in such cases, the graduate of a professional (entry-level) MPT program is denied the degree most appropriate to the program of study." ([www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org) Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Degree Frequently Asked Questions, 2002)

There are currently 14 Physical Therapy programs in California. Accredited DPT programs in CA include Azusa Pacific University, Chapman University, Loma Linda University\*, Mount St. Mary's College, Samuel Merritt College, University of California, San Francisco/ San Francisco State, University of Southern California, University of the Pacific, and Western University of Health Sciences\*. Those offering the master's degree are California State Universities at Fresno, Long Beach, Northridge and Sacramento.

Admissions requirements vary by program but most admissions committees are very selective and are looking for specific prerequisites courses, strong academic and prerequisite course records, the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), quality letters of recommendation, and work or volunteer experience in the field as indicators of potential to succeed. Application deadlines vary from November of the year prior to matriculation to February. Most programs require a student to have at least a 3.0 cumulative and prerequisite GPA, although the average GPA for accepted

students may be higher. Increasingly, programs are also requiring applicants to have paid or volunteer experience in one or more physical therapy settings and may ask that a student have adult CPR certification. Admission requirements can vary widely from program to program. Most programs require Anatomy, Physiology, the yearlong sequences of General Chemistry and Physics, all with laboratory plus courses in psychology and mathematics. Many programs also have additional required and strongly suggested courses. The CSU, Long Beach Health Professions Advising Office has compiled a CA PT program chart that compares admission requirements, which is available online at [www.sascenter.org/hpao](http://www.sascenter.org/hpao). Before planning your academic courses, consult each physical therapy program directly to confirm your selection. Students can obtain more information by visiting the American Physical Therapy Association web site address at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org).

\*To view Santa Ana College courses which meet admission requirements for DPT programs at Loma Linda University and Western University go to [www.sac.edu/students/counseling/sacstg/independent.html](http://www.sac.edu/students/counseling/sacstg/independent.html)

***3/09 Information courtesy of the CSU, Long Beach Health Professions Advising Office, [www.sascenter.org](http://www.sascenter.org)***