

# **ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS & TECHNICAL STANDARDS FROM ACCREDITED PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAMS**

## **Introductory Statements**

The Department of Physical Therapy, and its constituents, associated with Lebanon Valley College (LVC) are committed to the education of all qualified individuals, including persons with disabilities who, with or without reasonable accommodation, are capable of performing the essential functions of the educational program in which they are enrolled and the profession that they pursue. It is the policy of the Department of Physical Therapy to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and applicable federal and state laws regarding students and applicants with disabilities. Under these laws, no otherwise qualified and competent individual with a disability shall be denied access to or participation in services, programs, and activities solely on the basis of the disability.

The LVC Department of Physical Therapy endeavors to select applicants who have the ability to become highly competent physical therapists. As an accredited physical therapy program, the LVC curriculum in Physical Therapy adheres to the standards and guidelines of the Commission on Accreditation for Physical Therapy Education. Within these guidelines, LVC's Department of Physical Therapy has the freedom and ultimate responsibility for the selection and evaluation of its students, the design, implementation, and evaluation of its curriculum, and the determination of who should be awarded a degree. Admission and retention decisions are based not only on prior satisfactory academic achievement, but also on non-academic factors which serve to ensure that the candidate can complete the essential functions of the academic program required for graduation. The Department has the responsibility to the public to assure that its graduates can become fully competent and caring physical therapists, capable of doing benefit and not harm. Thus, it is important the persons admitted possess the intelligence, integrity, compassion, humanitarian concern, and physical and emotional capacity necessary to practice physical therapy.

## **Expectations of Potential and Current Physical Therapy Students**

The LVC Physical Therapy Program is a difficult and intense program which places specific demands on a student. during their academic and clinical preparation corresponding closely to the intellectual and physical demands a graduate will encounter as a practicing physical therapist. The Program has been designed to prepare students to enter the profession as a generalist with the skills, knowledge, and ability to successfully perform all the required functions associated with the role of an entry-level physical therapist. The purpose of this document is to delineate the essential functions associated with the role of the physical therapy student and the physical therapist, and to identify the technical abilities or standards needed to perform those functions. In keeping with applicable federal and state laws regarding disabilities and our program philosophy, we are committed to making reasonable accommodations for all individuals with disabilities to enable them to successfully complete their education and to perform the skills

necessary to the role of physical therapist. If a student feels they have a disability which may require special accommodation to perform any of the tasks identified in this document, it is the student's responsibility to register with the Office of Disability Services. Please read this document carefully to determine whether you are able to perform the required tasks.

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There is an expectation that every student will be able to perform the essential functions required for entry-level physical therapists, with or without reasonable accommodations, while practicing safely, ethically, and in a legal manner. A reasonable accommodation means any reasonable modification of the institution's rules, policies or practices. This may include but is not limited to environmental adjustments (such as the removal of architectural or communicative barriers) or auxiliary aids and services. An accommodation is not reasonable if it would result in undue financial or administrative burdens, require a fundamental alteration to the integrity of the Physical Therapy Program curriculum, violate accreditation requirements, or require the waiver of essential program requirements.

If a student anticipates the need for reasonable accommodations to meet the requirements of the physical therapy coursework and/or clinical experiences, the student must register with the Office of Disability Services in order to obtain the required official notification of his/her accommodation needs. Students are encouraged to meet with faculty members by appointment or during office hours to discuss approved accommodations and how course requirements and activities may impact a student's ability to fully participate.

The LVC Physical Therapy Program requires that students returning from a medical leave of absence from the program undergo an evaluation for the purpose of determining whether the student meets these technical standards, essential characteristics and abilities required of the Physical Therapy Program.

The essential functions and technical standards set forth in this document establish the essential program requirements necessary for students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values to function as an entry-level physical therapist and to meet the expectations of the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapist Education (CAPTE).

## **ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS**

In line with federal regulations established by the Americans With Disabilities Act, the following standards are described to assist each candidate in evaluating his/her prospect for academic and clinical success. "Essential Functions" refer to acceptable demonstration of mastery and/or competence in various disciplines throughout the professional phase of the LVC Physical Therapy Program. Acceptable levels of mastery are judged by faculty members, examinations, and other measurements of performance. These areas of competency are discussed in the following sections, in both general and specific requirements:

## General Abilities

The student is expected to possess functional use of the senses of vision, touch, and hearing so that data received by the senses may be integrated, analyzed, and synthesized in a consistent and accurate manner. A student must also possess the ability to perceive pain, pressure, temperature, position, vibration, position equilibrium, and movement that are important to the student's ability to gather significant information needed to manage patients effectively.

## Sensory Abilities

Sensory abilities include the ability to *perceive* all information necessary for effective patient/client management, inclusive of functional use of vision, hearing and tactile sensations. During classroom, laboratory and experiential learning activities (including but not limited to participation in one-on-one interactions, small group discussions and presentations, large-group lectures, and patient encounters) the student must be able to perceive the presentation of information through:

- Observation and vision
  - Ability to accurately observe and interpret:
    - lectures, laboratory dissection of cadavers, and lecture and laboratory demonstrations
    - digital and waveform readings and other graphic images to determine a patient's condition
    - physical and emotional status of overall gross appearance and specific local anatomical structures
    - audiovisual presentations and written materials in lecture.
    - laboratory demonstrations and procedures
    - patients/clients (at a distance and close at hand)
    - treatment equipment, inclusive of textual and graphic readouts, and environment (at a distance and close at hand)
    - a client's or patient's activity and behavior during examinations and interventions as well as changes in status such as skin temperature and/or color, heart rate, facial expression, muscle tone, breath sounds, and breathing rate or pattern
    - demonstrations in the classroom, projected slides or overheads, x-rays and other forms of diagnostic imaging, and monitor dials on equipment
    - visual information from clients, e.g., movement, posture, body mechanics, and gait necessary for comparison to normal standards for purposes of examination of movement dysfunctions
    - visual information from treatment environment, e.g., dials on modalities and monitors, assistive devices, furniture, flooring, structures, etc...
  
- Auditory ability for:

- Effective auscultation/auditory evaluation inclusive of but not limited to:
  - lungs, heart, apical pulse, blood pressure, joint noises, prostheses.
- Environmental cues inclusive of but not limited to:
  - phones, overhead paging systems, verbal communication in a setting with competing ambient noise.
- Tactile ability for:
  - Appropriate feedback related to safe application of gradient pressures during examination and intervention including but not limited to:
    - palpation, manual muscle testing, joint mobilization, percussion, massage.)
    - manipulation of dials, sensors, switches on all examination and therapeutic equipment

### **Motor Abilities**

The student must be able to perform gross and fine motor movements with coordination sufficient to perform complete physical examinations using a variety of examination maneuvers. A student must develop the psycho-motor skills reasonably needed to perform interventions, including management and operation of therapeutic healthcare equipment used in the general practice of a physical therapist. The student must be (1) able to maintain consciousness and equilibrium, (2) have sufficient levels of postural control, neuromuscular control, and eye-to-hand coordination, and (3) possess the physical and mental stamina to meet the demands associated with extended periods of sitting, standing, moving, lifting, and physical exertion required for satisfactory performance in patient care and classroom/laboratory settings. These skills are reflective of the physical capacities required to perform the job of a physical therapist in a wide variety of settings

Students must be able to:

- Perform physical therapy examination and intervention procedures in a manner that is consistent with the American Physical Therapy Association's (APTA) Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Practice.
- Maintain and assume a variety of positions including sitting for up to 2 hours continuously, frequent standing, walking, bending, squatting, kneeling, stair climbing, reaching forward, reaching overhead, turning and movement of the trunk and neck in all directions
- Perform manual material handling and manipulation of various sizes and weights including lifting and transferring patients, guarding patients during gait training on level surfaces/uneven surfaces/ramps/stairs, pushing and pulling to provide resistance and to assist in maneuvering patients. Specific requirements include:
  - Safely lift up to 50 lbs. independently
  - Safely lift up to 200 lbs. with assistance
  - Safely push and pull up to 200 lbs.
- Demonstrate strong bilateral grasp during joint mobilization / manipulation and manually resisted exercise, bilateral gross and fine motor control and strength to

- perform therapeutic massage, fine motor control to manipulate testing instruments/equipment/ writing instruments/computers.
- Manually palpate various body structures during examination and intervention procedures.
  - Balance self and provide support and balance to patients on a variety of surfaces including level and uneven ground, ramps, curbs, and stairs.
  - Have sufficient endurance to continue performing a variety of exertional activities for up to 8-12 hours with occasional rest breaks.
  - Respond quickly to emergency situations by lifting/pushing/pulling patients, applying force to perform CPR, assist with transporting patients.
  - Perform a patient examination, palpation, percussion, auscultation and other diagnostic maneuvers and procedures.
  - Perform general movements to provide therapeutic care, such as transfer/transport and position disabled patients, physically restrain adults and children who lack motor control, position and reposition self around patients, gait training, manual mobilization techniques, and wound debridement.
  - Perform basic life support (including CPR).
  - Maintain upright sitting posture.
  - Maintain upright standing posture.
  - Locomotion ability to:
    - Get to lecture, lab and clinical locations, and move within rooms as needed for changing groups, partners and work stations.
    - Physically maneuver in required clinical settings, to accomplish assigned tasks related to effective, safe patient management, and to ensure on-site monitoring
  - Manual tasks:
    - Maneuver another person's body parts to effectively perform examination techniques.
    - Manipulate common tools used for screening tests of the cranial nerves, sensation, range of motion, blood pressure, e.g., cotton balls, safety pins, goniometers, Q-tips, aesthesiometer, sphygmomanometer.
    - Safely and effectively guide, facilitate, inhibit, and resist movement and motor patterns through physical facilitation and inhibition techniques (including ability to give time urgent verbal feedback).
    - Manipulate another person's body in transfers, gait, positioning, exercise, and mobilization techniques.
    - Manipulate examination and treatment equipment safely and accurately apply to clients.
    - Manipulate bolsters, pillows, plinths, mats, gait assistive devices, and other supports or chairs to aid in positioning, moving, or treating a patient effectively.
    - Competently perform and supervise cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) using guidelines issued by the American Heart Association.
    - Perform fine motor/hand skills

- Legibly record/document examinations, patient care notes, referrals, etc. in standard medical charts in hospital/clinical settings in a timely manner and consistent with the acceptable norms of clinical settings.
- Legibly record thoughts for written assignments and tests.
- Sense changes in an individual's muscle tone, skin quality, joint play, kinesthesia, and temperature to gather accurate examination information in a timely manner and sense that individual's response to environmental changes and intervention.
- Safely apply and adjust therapeutic modalities.
- Safely and effectively position hands and apply mobilization techniques.
- Use a telephone.
- Use a computer.

### **Communication Abilities**

Effective communication includes the ability to receive, interpret, utilize and disseminate information via verbal, non-verbal, and written communication in a manner that is comprehensible by faculty, student peers, colleagues, clients, and laypersons. The student must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently, and in a timely manner with all members of the health care team in both verbal and written modes. The student must be able to receive and give feedback and criticism, communicate appropriately during conflict, and effectively communicate with socially and culturally diverse individuals and groups.

Perspective students, as well as students currently enrolled in the professional phase of the LVC Physical Therapy Program must be able to communicate verbally, non-verbally, and in written form as identified below:

#### **Verbal**

- Express own ideas and feelings clearly and demonstrate a willingness and ability to give and receive feedback.
- Receive and send verbal communication in emergency situations in a timely manner within the acceptable norms of clinical settings.
- Analyze and communicate information on the patient's status with accuracy in a timely manner to members of the health care team, including seeking supervision and consultation in a timely manner.
- Demonstrate interpersonal skills as needed for productive classroom discussion, respectful interaction with classmates and faculty, and development of appropriate therapist patient relationships.
- Communicate clearly and audibly during interactions with classmates, professors, patients and members of the healthcare team.
- Listen attentively and actively in order to receive and interpret oral communication.
- Communicate effectively and sensitively in English with other students, faculty, staff, patients, family, and other professionals, in both oral and written formats.

- Elicit a thorough history from patients; and communicate complex findings in appropriate terms to patients and to various members of the health care team.

### Non-Verbal

- Establish rapport with client, care givers and colleagues.
- Observe patients for the purposes of eliciting information; accurately describing changes in facial expression, mood, activity, and posture; and perceiving nonverbal communication.
- Recognize and promptly respond to emotional communications such as sadness, worry, agitation, pain and lack of comprehension of therapist communication.
- Use therapeutic communication, such as attending, clarifying, coaching, facilitating, and touching.

### Written (Manual and computer)

- Receive, write, and interpret written communication in both academic and clinical settings.
- Read and record observations and plans legibly, efficiently, and accurately in documents such as the patient's record, which may be written or electronic.
- Complete reading assignments and search and evaluate the literature.
- Complete written assignments and maintain written records, including both handwritten and electronic.
- Communicate effectively and efficiently in oral and written English
- Communicate appropriately with patients, family members, physicians, and other health care providers.
- Participate in group meetings to deliver and receive complex information
- Respond to questions from a variety of sources
- Respond appropriately to verbal and non-verbal communication
- Share information formally and informally with others

### **Intellectual, Conceptual, Integrative, and Quantitative Abilities**

The student must be able to develop and refine problem-solving skills crucial to practice as a physical therapist. Problem solving involves the abilities to (1) comprehend three-dimensional relationships and understand the spatial relationships of structures, (2) measure, calculate, reason, analyze, and synthesize objective and subjective data, and (3) make decisions that reflect consistent and thoughtful deliberation and sound clinical judgment. A student must also have the capacity to read and comprehend healthcare literature. Each student must demonstrate mastery of these skills and the ability to incorporate new information from peers, teachers, and the healthcare literature to formulate sound judgment in patient/client management.

### Behavioral and Social Attributes:

A candidate must possess the emotional health required for full utilization of his/ her intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt completion of all responsibilities attendant to the assessment and care of patients, the development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients families and members of the health care team, fulfillment of commitments, and accountability for actions and outcomes. These qualities include:

- Flexibility, compassion, integrity, motivation, effective interpersonal skills, and concern for others are personal attributes required of physical therapists
  - Emotional stability required to exercise sound judgment and to complete assessment and interventional activities.
  - Ability to establish rapport and maintain sensitive, interpersonal relationships with individuals, families, and groups from a variety of backgrounds
  - Adapt to changing environments
  - manage difficult interpersonal relationships during training
  - Learn to function cooperatively and efficiently in the face of the uncertainties inherent in clinical practice
- Display compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interest, and motivation
- Reasonably be able to accept criticism and respond by appropriate modification of behavior.
- Demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior at all times.
- Respect classmates, faculty, staff, patients and health care providers with cultural competence.
  - Follow Department and Clinic Handbook guidelines for attendance, punctuality, and attire.

### Affective Behavior

The student is expected to exhibit appropriate affective behavior, including:

- Appreciation and respect for individual, social, and cultural differences in fellow students, professional colleagues, patients and caregivers.
- Demonstrate appropriate behaviors and attitudes to protect the safety, confidentiality and well being of patients, faculty and classmates.
- Demonstrate ability to appropriately handle situations which may be physically, emotionally or intellectually stressful including situations which must be handled swiftly and calmly.
- Demonstrate flexibility and the ability to adjust to changing situations and uncertainty in an academic or clinical environment.
- Abide by the APTA code of Ethics, the Standards of Physical Therapy Practice and the Core Values which can be found on the American Physical Therapy Association website at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org).
- Establish professional, empathic relationships with individuals across the life span and from various cultures.
- Demonstrate integrity and honesty in all aspects of the academic and clinical environment.

- Engage in respectful interactions with individuals from various lifestyles, cultures, races, socioeconomic classes, and abilities.
- Develop and maintain respectful working relationships with peers, faculty, professional colleagues, patients, family members and the general public.
- Recognize the psychosocial impact of movement dysfunctions and disability on clients and families.
- Self-evaluate through a process of reflection and provide objective peer assessments and constructive faculty assessments.
- Possess the emotional health required for the full utilization of his or her intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt and safe completion of all responsibilities attendant to the diagnosis and care of patients and families.
- Maintain mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients, students, faculty, staff and other professionals in academic and clinical environments including highly stressful situations.
- Possess the emotional stability to function effectively under stress and to adapt to an environment that may change rapidly without warning and/or in unpredictable ways.
- Understand that his or her values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and experiences affect his or her perceptions and relationships with others.
- Possess the ability to reason morally and practice physical therapy in an ethical manner.
- Demonstrate the ability to be self-reflective, accept constructive criticism, and provide constructive criticism in a mature, professional manner
- Maintain general good health, self-care, and hygiene in order not to jeopardize the health and safety of self and individuals with which one interacts.
- Demonstrate appropriate assertiveness, delegate responsibilities, and function as part of a physical therapy team.

### **Cognitive/Intellectual Abilities**

Students must demonstrate critical thinking skills so that they can problem-solve creatively, master abstract ideas, and synthesize information presented in academic, laboratory and fieldwork settings. Students must be able to measure, calculate, reason, analyze, process, integrate, synthesize, apply and retain facts, concepts, and data related to the art and science of health care. In some areas, this requires comprehension of three-dimensional relationships and understanding of the spatial relationships of structures. Students must develop and exhibit a sense of medical ethics, and also recognize and apply pertinent legal and ethical standards. These cognitive skills are critical for the physical therapist to make clinical decisions during the examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention activities for patient/client management. Students must be able to:

- Measure, calculate, reason, analyze, synthesize, and apply large amounts of information in a short period of time.
- Understand and apply principles, theory, and research to physical therapy practice.

- Demonstrate the ability to think critically and problem-solve. Students must have the ability to accurately self-assess and reflect on their own performance
- Recall and retain information in an efficient manner in order to meet the minimal requirements classroom and clinical environments to provide safe and effective patient care.
- Gather information during patient examinations and throughout patient/client management to make clinical decisions.
- Appraise information to determine appropriate tests and measures during the patient/client examination.
- Evaluate the information gleaned from the patient/client examination, including patient history and any available medical/surgical/radiologic information, to formulate patient/client diagnoses, prognoses, and plans of care.
- Acknowledge limitations of knowledge and/or performance in order to provide safe, effective patient care including the necessity of referring the patient/client to other healthcare professionals.
- Prescribe therapeutic home programs as indicated by the results of the examination, utilizing a variety of instructional methods for patient/clients and/or family members.
- Utilize knowledge of natural, clinical, and social sciences to develop appropriate interventions in a clinical setting.
- Use critical analysis to understand theory, research literature, and principles that apply to physical therapy practice.
- Apply inductive and deductive clinical reasoning to solve complex patient problems.
- Reflect on performance accurately to self-assess.
- Measure, calculate, and reason.
- Identify significant findings based upon history and physical examination
- Interpret laboratory and diagnostic imaging data
- Comprehend three-dimensional spatial relationships of anatomic structures
- Utilize sufficient judgment to ensure safe encounters with peers and patients
- Utilize sufficient judgment to effectively delegate to assistive personnel

Cognitive requirements for evaluative and treatment procedures in the classroom and clinic include but are not limited to the ability to:

- Answer questions logically, concisely, in an organized fashion.
- Understand technically complex information.
- Discuss technically complex information in an open and constructive manner, accepting the possibility of multiple answers to a single question.
- Focus and maintain 100% arousal state for 50 minute class sessions and 3 hour lab sessions.
- Recognize and determine how to remedy an unsafe treatment environment.
- Cognitively participate in all classroom and clinic activities.
- Differentiate evidence, opinion and accepted practice patterns

## **Role of Essential Functions**

These essential functions of physical therapy education identify the requirements for admission, retention, and graduation of applicants and students respectively at the LVC Physical Therapy Program. Graduates are expected to be qualified to enter the field of physical therapy and to appropriately practice across diagnostic disciplines in line with current practice standards. It is the responsibility of the student with disabilities to request those accommodations that he/she feels are reasonable and are needed to execute the essential requirements described. Physical therapy students must meet the essential functions and technical standards required of the majority of physical therapy positions, unless they have special considerations that the College is able to accommodate under the “reasonable accommodations” of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These requirements are necessary for both the clinical portion of academic courses and clinical internships.

Individuals with disabilities (as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act) may be qualified to study and practice physical therapy with the use of reasonable accommodations. To be qualified for the study of physical therapy in the LVC Physical Therapy Program, students must be able to meet both academic standards and essential functions, with or without reasonable accommodation. Accommodation is viewed as a means of assisting students with disabilities to meet essential standards by providing them with an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of each course or clinical experience. (Reasonable accommodation is not intended to guarantee that students will be successful in meeting the requirements of any one course or clinical education.)

When a student’s ability to perform is compromised, the student must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to perform the essential functions described. The essential functions and abilities required by the curriculum are categorized as observational, sensory, motor, communication, intellectual (conceptual, integrative), quantitative abilities for problem solving and patient assessment) and the behavioral and social aspects of the performance of a physical therapist.

An offer for admission can be withdrawn and a student in the LVC Physical Therapy Program may be withdrawn if it becomes apparent that the applicant/student is unable to perform the essential skills/ technical functions required to complete the program with or without reasonable accommodation.

## **The Use of Auxiliary Aids and Intermediaries**

Qualified students with documented disabilities, who are provided with reasonable accommodations, may use an intermediary or an auxiliary aid. 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. Such reasonable accommodations should be designed to help the student meet learning outcomes without eliminating essential program elements or fundamentally altering the

DPT curriculum. Thus, accommodations cannot eliminate essential program elements or fundamentally alter the DPT curriculum.

**Procedures:**

1. Upon admission to the LVC Physical Therapy Program, all students must sign a form acknowledging that they have read and understand the essential functions.
2. Students who may have concerns about meeting these expectations are advised to meet with the Chair of the Department of Physical Therapy.
3. If a student feels that he/she requires reasonable accommodation for didactic and/or clinical components of the program, he/she must contact the [Center for Accessibility Resources](#) before any accommodations can be made. Students who have a change in status at any point during their matriculation in the PT program requiring accommodation should begin this process at the time of status change.
4. Due to the time it takes to properly evaluate a student’s needs and to implement reasonable accommodations, it is recommended that students request accommodations as early as possible. While it is possible that need for reasonable accommodation may arise unexpectedly, it is preferable to make a request for accommodation at least 30 days before the start of a course or clinical education experience.

**References**

1. Evaluative Criteria for Accreditation of Education Programs for the Preparation of Physical Therapists (Adopted October 26, 2004 and effective January 1, 2006; revised 5/07, 10/07, 4/09), Commission on Accreditation for Physical Therapy Education.
2. Pacific University School of Physical Therapy. The ADA: Physical Therapy Education, Admission, and Reasonable Accommodation.
3. PT Programs: Medical College of Georgia, Samuel Merritt College, University of Colorado, University of Kentucky, University of Miami, University of Scranton, University of Tennessee, Memphis, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, Texas Woman’s University, University of Indianapolis, University of Minnesota, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
4. UMDNJ-School of Health-Related Professions. Essential/Technical Standards for Enrollment in Courses.

I have read and understand the Essential Functions of Physical Therapist Education as stated by Lebanon Valley College. If I require accommodation for any of the essential functions outlined above, I am to contact the Coordinator of Disability Services in Humanities Room 4, 867-6071.

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Student Signature

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Date

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Witness Signature

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Date