

## Essential Functions and Technical Standards of Physical Therapy Education

### INTRODUCTION

The Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Western Carolina University (WCU) is a difficult and intense program which places specific demands on the enrolled student which correspond closely to the intellectual, mental, emotional and physical demands which a graduate will encounter as a practicing physical therapist.

The program at WCU 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 qualified 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 he/she has a disability which may require special accommodation to perform any of the tasks identified below, it is the student's responsibility to contact the Office of Disability Services:**

- Campus location: 135 Killian Annex
- Phone: 828 227-3886
- Email: [disabilityservices@wcu.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@wcu.edu)
- Webpage: <http://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-services/disability-services/>

The university uses independent clinical education sites that may or may not be willing or able to offer the same reasonable accommodations that are made available by the university. The fact that the university offers reasonable accommodations to allow a student with a disability to complete an educational program is not a guarantee, implied or otherwise, that a graduate will be able to secure subsequent employment offering those same accommodations.

Please read carefully the following “Essential Functions” and “Technical Standards” to determine whether you are able to perform the required tasks.

## ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS and TECHNICAL STANDARDS

The faculty concur that a candidate for the Doctor of Physical Therapy degree must have aptitude, abilities, and skills in the following five areas in order to perform in a reasonably competent and independent manner:

### 1. Sensorimotor:

Candidates must have sufficient gross motor, fine motor and equilibrium functions to elicit information from patients by palpation, auscultation, percussion, and other diagnostic maneuvers. A candidate must be able to execute motor movements required to provide therapeutic intervention (e.g., patient transfers, exercise and application of electrotherapy) and emergency treatment (including cardiopulmonary resuscitation) to patients. Quick reactions are necessary not only for safety, but for efficient and effective therapeutic intervention. The student must have the ability to move him- or herself and the patient in three-dimensional space in order to perform motor function tests and treatment. Additionally, the student must be able to ensure the physical safety of a patient at all times. Such actions require coordination of both gross and fine muscular movements, equilibrium and functional integration of the senses (hearing, vision, smell and touch).

### 2. Observation Skills:

A candidate must be able to observe a patient accurately at a distance and close at hand. Observation necessitates the functional use of the sense of vision and other sensory modalities. The candidate must be able to observe demonstrations and learn from experiences in the basic sciences and in the clinical physical therapy laboratory such as participate in cadaver dissection; accurately read dials on electrotherapeutic equipment and numbers on a goniometer; hear heart and breath sounds; assess normal and abnormal color changes in the skin; and observe pupil changes.

### 3. Communication Skills:

Communication includes both receptive and expressive components as well as reading and writing. The candidate must be able to assimilate information from written sources (texts, journals, medical/school records, etc.). The candidate must be able to attain, comprehend, retain, and utilize new information presented in written formats as well as produce appropriate written documentation. Candidates must be able to speak, to hear and to observe patients in order to elicit information, describe changes in mood, activity and posture and perceive/interpret non-verbal communications. Candidates must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently in oral and written form with all members of the health care team (including settings where the time available is limited). Appropriate communication may rely on the student's ability to make a correct judgment in seeking supervision and consultation in a timely manner. The candidate must be capable of responsive, empathetic listening to establish rapport in a way that promotes openness on issues of concern and sensitivity to potential cultural differences.

4. Intellectual, Conceptual, Integrative, Quantitative and Problem Solving Abilities:

These abilities include, but are not limited to, measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, synthesis and retention of complex information. Problem solving, the critical skill demanded of physical therapists, requires all of these intellectual abilities. In addition, the candidate must be able to discern and comprehend dimensional and spatial relationships of structures.

5. Behavioral and Social Attributes and Professionalism:

Candidates must possess the emotional health required for full use of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of good judgment, the prompt completion of all responsibilities attendant to the evaluation, diagnosis and care of a patient, and the development of mature, sensitive and effective relationships with patients. Candidates must be able to tolerate physically-taxing workloads and to function effectively under stress. They must be able to adapt to an environment which may change rapidly without warning and/or in unpredictable ways. They must display flexibility and learn to function in the face of uncertainties inherent in the clinical problems of many patients.

*I certify by my signature below that I have read and understand the essential functions and technical standards for the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Western Carolina University. I believe to the best of my knowledge that I meet these standards with or without reasonable accommodation.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*I do not believe I can meet these essential functions in their entirety and will contact the Office of Disability Services to begin the process of documenting my disability and considering reasonable accommodation.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

***Please return this document by July 10, 2016 to:***

***Linda Donaldson, University Program Specialist  
Department of Physical Therapy  
3971 Little Savannah Road  
232 Health and Human Sciences Building  
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Cullowhee, NC 28723  
[donaldson@email.wcu.edu](mailto:donaldson@email.wcu.edu)***