

Program Review

Executive Summary

Physical Therapist Assistant

Majors Reviewed:

- *Physical Therapist Assistant (TP), A.A.S.*

AY2021-22



Pennsylvania
College of Technology
A Penn State Affiliate

The Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program prepares students for a dynamic and satisfying career providing rehabilitation to individuals throughout the lifespan with injuries, illnesses, and developmental delays. Graduates of the two-year Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree program are qualified to sit for National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE); upon licensure, graduates are qualified to provide physical therapy interventions under the direction and supervision of a licensed physical therapist (PT).

Since its inception in 2017, the program has provided a student-centered, comprehensive curriculum taught by physical therapy practitioners with diverse clinical backgrounds and content expertise. Program highlights include small class sizes and a state-of-the-art laboratory equipped with tools graduates encounter in contemporary physical therapy practice. In addition, students hone their skills via three diverse clinical education experiences in outpatient, inpatient, and long-term care settings. The program maintains affiliations with over 65 healthcare organizations, resulting in over 300 clinical placements.

The outlook for PTAs continues to be bright. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Occupational Outlook Handbook), demand for PTAs is projected to grow 32% by 2030. The strong growth of the profession is supported by an increased need for rehabilitation due to an aging population and advancements in research and surgical procedures. Challenges for the profession include continuous decreases in reimbursement for physical therapy services, resulting in higher productivity demands, and changes to how PTAs are utilized.

Feedback obtained by the program indicates that employers are highly satisfied with program graduates. Many graduates receive job offers prior to graduation from both small and large regional healthcare organizations, and the program continuously boasts a 100% employment rate. Despite this, the program has seen a decline in enrollment in congruence with national trends. Visits to high school and CTC/CTE programs have increased and a digital marketing plan has been created. Additional marketing and recruitment strategies are being explored.

Another challenge facing the program is declining pass rates for the NPTE. Through course and program-level assessment and advisory committee input, many changes have been implemented, including changes to the selection process, curriculum, program rigor, and examination preparation. The efforts have already had a positive effect on pass rates and exam scores. Faculty and staff are confident that outcomes in the coming two years will continue to reflect the high-quality, competent graduates entering the workforce. Based on a comprehensive program review, recommendations for growth and improvement include:

- revise curriculum to update PTA program goals and required student outcomes;
- continue and further develop marking plan to increase enrollment in the pre-major;
- continue and further develop outreach to CTC/CTE programs;
- grow relationships with clinical partners for program support and recruitment;
- develop and assess effectiveness of NPTE preparation strategies, including the Practice Exam & Assessment Tool (PEAT) graduation requirement;
- recruit 2-3 new advisory board members from a variety of unrepresented healthcare organizations;
- explore adding technology to record skill assessments to improve student feedback;
- continue staff and faculty development related to student study/learning strategies and mental health/stress management strategies to improve student retention;
- explore program-specific scholarships and/or apprenticeships; and

- explore offering limited conditional seats to high-achieving students directly out of high school.