

# **UNC Division of Physical Therapy Technical Standards and Essential Functions**

## **Introduction**

The Division of Physical Therapy (“Division”) in the Allied Health Sciences Department at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (“University”) is committed to developing outstanding physical therapists from diverse backgrounds who demonstrate effective communication and critical thinking skills and who integrate evidence into practice.

In order to perform as a physical therapist, an individual must be able to meet certain Technical Standards and Essential Functions. Technical Standards are “skills and attributes [the Division] expects students to display; they are, by nature not academic or met solely through the acquisition of academic knowledge; however some Technical Standards may be related to academic knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to skills and abilities that students possess upon entering the program, we expect students to demonstrate potential for achieving Essential Functions through continued maturation and learning in the program. Essential Functions are “the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student must demonstrate in order to continue to be ‘qualified’ once he or she is enrolled and to graduate.”<sup>2</sup>

Division faculty maintain the responsibility to evaluate achievement of these Technical Standards and Essential Functions as they promote students based on their classroom and clinical education performance.

## **Commitment to Non-Discrimination/Seeking Reasonable Accommodations**

The University is committed to equality of educational opportunity. The University does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, color, creed, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

A student with a disability may participate in the program so long as the student satisfies program requirements, including these Technical Standards and Essential Functions, with or without reasonable accommodation. Students who seek reasonable accommodations for disabilities must contact the University’s Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (“ARS”) as soon as possible. The Office will determine a student’s eligibility for and recommend appropriate accommodations and services. ARS may be reached by phone at 919-962-8300 or by email at [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu).

## Technical Standards and Essential Functions

**Attitudinal, Behavioral, Interpersonal, and Emotional Attributes:** Division students must be able to relate to patients, families, and colleagues with honesty, integrity, and dedication in a non-discriminatory manner. Students must display appropriate sensitivity and respect for all social or cultural backgrounds. They must be able to identify personal reactions and responses, recognize multiple points of view, and integrate these appropriately into clinical decision-making.

Students must demonstrate **Attitudinal, Behavioral, Interpersonal and Emotional Attributes** including but not limited to:

- emotional health and maturity;
- the ability to establish a rapport with patients, families, and colleagues;
- the ability to nurture mature, sensitive, and effective relationships;
- conflict resolution skills, including the ability to negotiate differing attitudes and opinions;
- compassion, integrity, strong interpersonal skills, and motivation;
- a cooperative, professional manner;
- honesty and integrity;
- the ability to integrate constructive criticism received in both didactic and clinical environments;
- the ability to correctly judge the limits of one's own competence and to seek help from an appropriate source when necessary;
- the ability to seek assistance for health conditions that interfere with scholastic and/or professional performance;
- respect for all members of the University community, patients, and families;
- refrain from the use of illegal drugs and alcoholic beverages in academic and professional settings;
- manage stress effectively through self-care and by relying upon supportive relationships with colleagues, peers, and others;
- employ sound judgment

**Intellectual Skills:** Students must possess a range of intellectual skills that allows them to master the broad and complex body of knowledge that comprises a physical therapy curriculum. The Division requires students to be able to accurately follow course syllabi, assignment directions, and any actions plan(s) developed by faculty, administrators, or clinical instructors. Students must demonstrate the ability to learn and educate others through a wide variety of modalities, including, but not limited to:

- classroom instruction;
- small group discussion;
- individual study of materials;
- preparation and presentation of written and oral reports;
- use of computer-based technology; and
- clinical observation/hands-on experience.

**Reasoning Abilities:** Students must be able to analyze and synthesize information from various sources. Students must learn to solve difficult problems and to make diagnostic, prognostic, and therapeutic intervention decisions in a timely manner.

Specific, required **Reasoning Abilities** include but are not limited to the ability to:

- synthesize knowledge and integrate relevant aspects of the patient history and examination findings to determine an accurate physical therapy diagnosis, intervention, and plan of care within reasonable time constraints;
- undertake effective research to develop professional expertise and inform decision making;
- exercise sound judgment with the benefit of this information and knowledge/skills; and
- evaluate the effectiveness of professional interventions.

**Communication Skills:** Students must be able to ask questions, to receive answers perceptively, to record information about patients, and to educate patients. They must be able to communicate effectively and efficiently with patients, their families, and with other members of the health care team. Such effective communication includes verbal and non-verbal interactions, such as the interpretation of facial expressions, affects, and body language. Mastery of both written and spoken English is required at matriculation into the program, although applications from students with hearing and/or speech disabilities will receive full consideration. In such cases, the use of a trained intermediary or other communications aide may be appropriate if this intermediary functions only as an information conduit and does not serve integrative or interpretive functions.

Specific required **Communication Skills** include but are not limited to:

- competence in writing and speaking the English language;
- efficient, effective, accurate and timely communication using a range of communication media as appropriate to the purpose and audience (e.g.,-personal interactions, telephone calls, letters/memoranda, email messages, web-conferencing);
- use of communication and sensory skills to convey and elicit information;
- use of communication and sensory skills to facilitate decision making; and
- accurate perception of non-verbal information and cues in interpersonal encounters.

**Motor Abilities:** Student must possess the fine and gross motor skills necessary to provide care to patients of all ages and sizes. A student must demonstrate the physical ability to sufficiently move patient and self about in varying work environments, on various surfaces, and to and from different levels. Students must be able to demonstrate gross and fine motor skills in a safe and effective manner in order to optimize patient care. In addition, students must possess adequate motor ability to respond efficiently and effectively in an emergency situation.

Examples of specific **Motor Abilities** include but are not limited to the ability to:

- use of a keyboard or equivalent device to record patient information;
- assist a patient with floor to standing and standing to floor transfers;
- enter small areas (e.g., bathroom, car) with patients for instruction in safe transferring;
- provide manual resistance sufficient for a maximal manual muscle test (MMT) of large muscle groups;
- maintain simultaneous control of durable medical equipment (e.g., walker) and the patient during treatment;
- use surgical instruments for wound debridement;
- adapt manual inputs based on patient input/effort
- occasionally lift and support objects weighing 50 pounds;
- help perform multi-person transfers of obese patients;
- access transportation to and from clinical and didactic sites;
- assume and maintain a variety of body postures (e.g., sitting, standing, walking, bending, squatting, kneeling, stair climbing, reaching forward, reaching overhead, turning, movement of the trunk and neck in all directions) in order to adequately perform patient examination and intervention;
- balance self and provide support and balance to patients and equipment on a variety of surfaces including level and uneven ground, ramps, curbs, and stairs; and
- maintain sufficient endurance to effectively manage patient care.

**Visual, Auditory, and Tactile Competencies:** Students must possess sufficient visual, auditory, and tactile abilities to allow them to gather data from written reference material, from oral presentations, and from observed demonstrations. In addition, students must possess adequate visual, auditory, and tactile competencies in order to respond efficiently and effectively in an emergency situation.

Student must maintain sufficient **Visual, Auditory, and Tactile Abilities** to perform various parts of the patient examination and intervention, including, but not limited to the ability to:

- Tactile:
  - palpate body landmarks;
  - detect tissue/joint irregularities;
  - detect muscle activity sufficient to distinguish trace contractions; and
  - detect temperature.
- Auditory:
  - auscultate the heart and lungs;
  - hear medical alarms in case of an emergency; and
  - hear patient cries for help in order to respond quickly and efficiently in case of emergency.
- Visual:
  - visually examine patient movement patterns in order to adjust treatment;
  - assess environment for safety hazards; and
  - examine skin integrity and skin wounds in order to make clinical judgments.

**Professional Requirements:** Students must conduct themselves appropriately in all academic and clinical interactions both on and off-campus. Students must abide by all applicable

University policies (e.g. Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment and Related Misconduct) and must comply with the American Physical Therapy Association Code of Ethics and Guide for Professional Conduct:

<http://policies.unc.edu/files/2013/04/PPDHRM.pdf>

[https://www.apta.org/uploadedFiles/APTAorg/About\\_Us/Policies/HOD/Ethics/CodeofEthics.pdf](https://www.apta.org/uploadedFiles/APTAorg/About_Us/Policies/HOD/Ethics/CodeofEthics.pdf)

[http://www.apta.org/uploadedFiles/APTAorg/Practice\\_and\\_Patient\\_Care/Ethics/GuideforProfessionalConduct.pdf](http://www.apta.org/uploadedFiles/APTAorg/Practice_and_Patient_Care/Ethics/GuideforProfessionalConduct.pdf)

Students with criminal records may not be accepted at some or all clinical sites depending on the nature of the offense. In addition, criminal histories may prevent a program graduate from obtaining state licensure. Applicants with a criminal history may inquire with the Program Director or the NC Board of PT examiners to determine how offenses on their criminal record may influence their ability to complete the program and ultimately to become licensed and work in the field.

Students must meet specific **Professional Requirements** including but not limited to:

- arriving and being on time for professional commitments, including classes and clinical experiences;
- following appropriate dress code – clinical sites may commonly require wearing close-toed shoes, no denim, no artificial nails, and other requirements related to patient safety. The student must comply with the clinical education site’s dress code requirement during rotations.
- meeting deadlines for course assignments and program requirements;
- seeking assistance and following supervision in a timely manner;
- accepting and responding appropriately to constructive feedback;
- demonstrating attitudes of integrity, responsibility, and tolerance;
- being truthful about background, experiences, and qualifications;
- performing one’s own work, giving credit for the ideas of others, and providing proper citation of source materials;
- interacting courteously, fairly, and professionally with diverse individuals;
- demonstrating the ability to understand the perspectives of others in the context of teaching, counseling, and administration; and
- protecting the confidentiality of patient information consistent with applicable law.
- Participate in both the ‘therapist’ and ‘patient’ roles during physical examination and intervention procedures that will necessitate the exposure and touching of various parts of the body in order to learn and demonstrate curricular-related knowledge.

### **Procedure for Assessing Compliance of Technical Standards and Essential Functions**

Division faculty will assess each student’s ability to meet the Technical Standards and Essential Functions. Students must meet these Technical Standards and Essential Functions before entering the clinical education component of the curriculum. The Technical Standards and Essential Functions will be made available on the UNC DPT admissions requirements webpage for applicants to view prior to applying to the program.

- The Technical Standards and Essential Functions will be mailed to students with the offer of admission to the program, along with related materials.
- The student will read this document and send the “Technical Standards and Essential Functions Statement of Understanding” document back to the Physical Therapy program within one month of receipt.
- Failure to meet the Technical Standards and Essential Functions may prevent the student from entering the clinical education component of the curriculum or from progressing to more demanding aspects of the academic program. If, in the professional judgment of the faculty, no reasonable accommodation can be made to allow successful performance, the student may be terminated from the program.
- Students who seek reasonable accommodations for a diagnosed disability should refer to the section entitled “Commitment to Non-Discrimination/Seeking Reasonable Accommodations.”

Upon reviewing this document, if you have additional questions please contact:

**Accessibility Resource Services:**

Tiffany Bailey, Director of ARS – [tmbaily@email.unc.edu](mailto:tmbaily@email.unc.edu)

Simon Bloor, Assistant Director of ARS – [simon.bloor@unc.edu](mailto:simon.bloor@unc.edu)

**Division of Physical Therapy:**

Dana McCarty, PT, DPT, Director of Clinical Education – [dana\\_mccarty@med.unc.edu](mailto:dana_mccarty@med.unc.edu)

Lisa Johnston, PT, MS, DPT, Assistant Director and Co-DCE – [lisa\\_johnston@med.unc.edu](mailto:lisa_johnston@med.unc.edu)

Deborah L. Givens, PT, PhD, DPT, Director of Division of Physical Therapy –  
[Deborah\\_givens@med.unc.edu](mailto:Deborah_givens@med.unc.edu)

**References:**

1. “Technical Standards.” UNC Accessibility and Resource Services.  
<https://accessibility.unc.edu/information-relating-graduate-and-professional-programs/technical-standards>. Accessed November 11, 2015.
2. Carey BM, Turnwald GH, Kalleem H, Bleyer K, and Blacklock B. Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in Health-Related Education Programs. Huntersville, NC. Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD); 2014.

**Technical Standards and Essential Functions Statement of Understanding**

I have received a copy of the "UNC Division of Physical Therapy Technical Standards and Essential Functions" from the UNC Physical Therapy Program.

I understand that the information provided in this document is intended to serve as a guide regarding the physical, emotional, intellectual and psychosocial expectations placed on a student physical therapist. I also understand that the role of the physical therapist may vary according to the clinical site requirements and that this document cannot include every conceivable action, task, ability or behavior that may be expected of me upon graduation.

I understand that the safety of patients, co-workers, and myself is of upmost importance. Therefore, I agree to provide information about any limitations or conditions that may directly or indirectly affect my ability to meet these requirements now or in the foreseeable future. I further agree to notify ARS and Division faculty should the status of my abilities change in the future. I agree to cooperate with ARS and Division faculty in the event assessment for possible task modification needs to be done as a secondary phase of the admission process.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initials) I have read and I understand the Technical Standards and Essential Functions for a student in the UNC Physical Therapy Program.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initials) I am able to meet the Technical Standards and Essential Functions as presented, and have been provided with information concerning accommodations if needed at this time.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initials) I understand that criminal background checks are required annually. Students with criminal records may not be accepted at some or all clinical sites depending on the nature of the offense. In addition, criminal histories may prevent a program graduate from obtaining state licensure. Applicants with a criminal history may inquire with the Program Director or the NC Board of PT examiners to determine how offenses on their criminal record may influence their ability to complete the program and ultimately to become licensed and work in the field.

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Return completed form within one month of receipt to:**

Perry Studevent; [Perry\\_Studevent@med.unc.edu](mailto:Perry_Studevent@med.unc.edu)

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