

# Planning for Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy School



## Career Services

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**Both Occupational and Physical Therapy are projected to have much faster than average growth in the coming years, with job opportunities high, especially for those working with the elderly. Related occupations include audiology, chiropractic medicine, respiratory therapy, athletic training, recreation therapy and speech-language pathology.**

### What is Physical Therapy?

Physical therapists (PTs) diagnose and treat patients of all ages who have physical conditions which impair their ability to move and perform functional activities. They examine patients and determine a course of treatment to promote ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. They also work to prevent loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness and wellness programs for more active lifestyles. PTs treat patients who have suffered injuries, burns, amputations, strokes, or who have arthritis, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy and many other injuries and have lost the ability to move normally. Physical therapists help patients perform therapeutic exercise, functional training, manual therapy techniques, assistive and adaptive devices and equipment, and physical agents and electrotherapeutic modalities.

The median annual wage of physical therapists was \$84,020 in May 2015. Employment of physical therapists is expected to increase 34 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for physical therapy services will come, in large part, from the aging baby boomers, who are staying active later in life than previous generations did.

Certification involves a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) from a school accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). DPT programs typically take three years. Students must also take a licensure exam.

### What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational therapy is a health profession which provides services to people whose lives have been disrupted by disabling conditions. Occupational therapists (OTs) treat physical injury and illness, developmental problems, the aging process and social or psychological difficulties by helping patients develop skills, routines, and techniques for day-to-day living. They help patients in ways including recovering basic motor function, improving memory skills, such as list-making, and through use of adaptive equipment. In addition to helping patients improve ability to navigate their daily lives, they help communities prevent and reduce disability and the factors that hinder health development. For example, OTs who work with children may modify classroom equipment and help children participate in activities, including following directions and personal grooming. Those who work with the elderly may work on driving independence, or assess homes for hazards to prevent falling.

The median annual wage of occupational therapists was \$80,150 in May 2015. Employment of occupational therapists is expected to increase 27 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations. Occupational therapy will continue to be an important part of treatment for people with various illnesses and disabilities, such as Alzheimer's disease, cerebral palsy, autism, or the loss of a limb. While the majority of OTs are employed in healthcare facilities (such as hospitals and

long term care facilities) 24.5% of OTs work in early intervention and/or school based practice. OTs enjoy one of the lowest unemployment rates (1.3%).

Occupational Therapists must have obtained a Master's degree or higher. They have the option of taking a certifying exam by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) for better career options. There are now 45 accredited or developing programs at the doctoral (OTD) level and 184 programs accredited or developing at the masters (MOT/ MS) level. The fastest growth is happening at the doctoral level.

### Work Environment

Physical therapists practice in hospitals, outpatient clinics, and private offices that have specially equipped facilities. These jobs can be physically demanding, because therapists may have to stoop, kneel, crouch, lift, and stand for long periods. In addition, physical therapists move heavy equipment and lift patients or help them turn, stand, or walk. In 2014, most full-time physical therapists worked a 40-hour week; some worked evenings and weekends to fit their patients' schedules. About 20 percent of physical therapists worked part-time.

Occupational therapists also generally work about a 40-hour week. Many work for multiple facilities and have significant travel time. About 25 percent of OTs work part-time. Those who are employed in large rehabilitation centers work with large machines, equipment, and noise-generating devices. They face long hours on their feet and the hazard of back-strain from moving clients and equipment.

### Becoming a Physical or Occupational Therapist

#### Accredited Physical Therapy Programs in Texas (US rank)

Angelo State University (164)  
Hardin-Simmons University (118)  
Texas State University (101)  
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (53)  
Texas Woman's University (28)  
University of North Texas (101)  
University of the Incarnate Word (193)  
US Army-Baylor University (8)  
UT El Paso (154)  
UT Health Science Center at San Antonio (79)  
UT Medical Branch at Galveston (53)  
UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas (64)

#### Top Three PT Programs in US (2016)

University of Southern California  
University of Delaware  
University of Pittsburg/Washington University in St. Louis

#### Occupational Therapy Programs in Texas (US rank)

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (37)  
Texas Woman's University (Denton) (17)  
Texas Woman's University (Dallas and Houston) (22)  
The University of Texas at El Paso (88)  
The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (44)  
The University of Texas Pan American (75)  
The University of Texas School Medical Branch (14)

## Top Three OT Programs in US (2016)

University of Southern California  
Boston University  
Washington University in St. Louis

## Prerequisites for PT and OT Programs

### Academic

Most graduate programs in PT and OT require completion of an undergraduate degree, ideally with a GPA of 3.5 or higher, while a few will admit students after three years of undergraduate study. Competition is ferocious! Specific requirements for each school's application process vary and may change at any point. Visit school websites for the most recent directions for application. In Texas, PT and OT program prerequisites are very similar and usually require the following courses:

- General biology (most programs require a lab component)
- General chemistry
- Anatomy/physiology with labs
- Physics
- Statistics
- Psychology

Programs may also require:

- Genetics
- Physiology
- English and technical writing
- Speech
- Medical terminology
- Sociology

### Non-Academic: Paid or Volunteer Experience

While academics are important, many PT and OT programs also require the applicant spend significant hours (from a minimum of 20 to over 100) gaining hands-on patient contact. Local PT/OT volunteerism opportunities include:

- Easter Seals Central Texas, Round Rock
- Texas Physical Therapy Specialists (Georgetown)
- St. David's Georgetown Hospital Cardiac Rehabilitation
- KidWorks Therapy Services, Austin
- North Austin Medical Center
- OT Connection, Pflugerville
- Ride on Center for Kids (R.O.C.K.), Georgetown
- Reavis Rehab, Round Rock
- Wellness Matters Physical Therapy, Austin

## Application Process

Applying to PT and OT schools is a long process, and you should plan on applying one year in advance of enrollment. Because each program has its own admissions process and requirements change, you should contact the school to determine admission requirements and application deadlines.

### PTCAS/OTCAS

Many, but not all, PT and OT programs require applicants to apply through the Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS), a service of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), and the OT Centralized Application Service (OTCAS), through the American Occupational Therapy Association. Each CAS allows applicants to use a single application and one set of materials to apply to multiple programs. The applications typically open in July. Application deadlines vary by specific school. Apply early – your application typically takes 4-5 weeks to process through the CAS.

### Testing

Most PT and OT programs require applicants to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Minimum scores accepted will

vary between institutions. More information about the GRE is available at [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org).

### Recommendations

Generally three letters of recommendation or recommendation forms are required. You should also gather one additional letter from an instructor (preferably in the sciences) and one from another employer or volunteer advisor.

### Personal statement/essays

Applications will generally require one or several essays about your interest in and preparation for becoming a physical or occupational therapist.

### The Interview

The interview is typically the last step of the admissions process. It allows the committee to learn more about the applicant and the applicant to learn more about the school. A tour of the school's facilities may be provided the day of the interview. The interview day also provides additional opportunities to ask questions of the committee and the tour guide.

## Additional Information

### Websites

Bureau of Labor Statistics – Physical Therapists  
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Healthcare/Physical-therapists.htm>

American Physical Therapy Association  
<http://www.apta.org>

Texas Physical Therapy Association  
<http://www.tpta.org/>

The Princeton Review: Physical Therapist  
<http://www.princetonreview.com/careers/114/physical-therapist>

Bureau of Labor Statistics – Occupational Therapists  
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm>

American Occupational Therapy Association  
<http://www.aota.org/>

Texas Occupational Therapy Association  
<http://www.tota.org>

StudentDoctor.net (Rehabilitation Sciences)  
<http://www.studentdoctor.net>

U.S. News and World Report School Rankings  
<http://www.usnews.com/>

Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service  
<http://www.ptcas.org/Home.aspx>

OT Centralized Application Services  
<https://otcas.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login>

### Career Services' Print Resources

Career Opportunities in Health Care  
Careers in Social and Rehabilitation Services  
Establishing a Career in Sports Medicine  
Exploring Health Care Careers, Volume 2  
Opportunities in Physical Therapy Careers  
Opportunities in Occupational Therapy Careers

Adapted from:

Health Professions Office, UT Austin; Professional & Graduate Advising, TAMU; American Physical Therapy Association; US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics