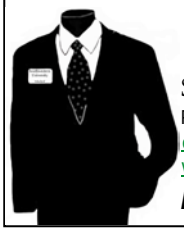
Planning for Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy School



Career Services

Southwestern University at Georgetown, Texas
Prothro Center 1st Floor, 512.863.1346, 512.863.1270 fax
career.services@southwestern.edu
www.southwestern.edu/careers

Here to help you get ahead.

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 $82,390 in May 2014. Employment of physical therapists is expected to increase 39 percent from 2010 to 2020, 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 $72,320 in May 2010. Employment of occupational therapists is expected to increase 33 percent from 2010 to 2020, 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.

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.

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 2010, most full-time physical therapists worked a 40-hour week; some worked evenings and weekends to fit their patients' schedules. About 29 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 30 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 (154)
Hardin-Simmons University (99)
Texas State University (63)
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (75)
Texas Woman's University (27)
University of North Texas (new, not ranked in 2012)
University of the Incarnate Word (new, not ranked in 2012)
US Army-Baylor University (5)
UT El Paso (172)
UT Health Science Center at San Antonio (75)
UT Medical Branch at Galveston (39)
UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas (63)

Top Three PT Programs in US (2012)
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 (83)
Texas Woman's University (Denton)(15)
Texas Woman's University (Dallas and Houston) (21)
The University of Texas at El Paso (116)
The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (54)
The University of Texas Pan American (148)
The University of Texas School Medical Branch (14)

Top Three OT Programs in US (2012)
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
- Georgetown Physical Therapy
- 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.

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.

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. Its purpose is to allow the committee to learn more about the applicant and allow 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/

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, University of Texas at Austin
Professional & Graduate Advising, Texas A&M University
American Physical Therapy Association
US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics