

## PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT PROGRAM

### FACTS SHEET

The Physical Therapist Assistant program at Wallace State Community College is a two-year course of study. The first year of general education prerequisites should be complete before being eligible to apply to the Physical Therapist Assistant Program. Three semesters are necessary to complete the final year of the program, which begins in the fall semester. The second-year classes include technical and clinical experience in a variety of health-care settings where the student performs selected clinical procedures under the supervision of a Licensed Physical Therapist or Physical Therapist Assistant.

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## **What do PTA's do?**

The Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) is a skilled technical health care worker who, under the supervision of a Physical Therapist, assists in patient treatment. The physical therapist assistant, following the plan of care developed by the supervising physical therapist, delivers care to the patient using established procedures. Duties of the PTA are varied but include rehabilitation of orthopedic, neurologic, pediatric, and sports-related problems. Physical Therapist Assistants are employed in general hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, home health-care agencies, private practices, and other specialized health-care settings.

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## **Where can I obtain information about the program?**

You can make an appointment with a Health Program advisor through the ACTION (advising) Center at 256-352-8040. For general program information, contact Jennifer Dunkle at 256-352-8411. Students may also call 256-352-8316 or 256-352-8426 and speak with a PTA advisor Monday through Friday from 7:45-3:15 to set up advisory sessions, turn in applications, or register for classes. If an advisor is unavailable you may leave a message on the answering machine with a phone number where we can contact you. You may also contact the Office of Recruiting at 256-352-8031 to have a program application and program information mailed to you.

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## **When can I apply for the program?**

Following the completion of the first year of general education / prerequisite courses, you should submit an application for the PTA program between April 1 and June 1 of the year in which you would like to start the PTA program classes. PTA Program classes begin in the fall of each year. Please note – a new application is required each time you apply. Keep copies of everything submitted as items from previous applications will not be released.

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## **What information is required to complete an application?**

The following information is required to be submitted directly to the Admissions Office: WSCC application, official transcripts from each college attended and an ACT score of 18 or higher. The following information should be submitted directly to the PTA Program: completed PTA program application, documentation of physical therapy volunteer/observation experience, as well as student copies of your transcripts and ACT score. See application packet for additional details.

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## **How much volunteer/observation experience is required?**

You must have 24 hours of observation in a minimum of 2 different facilities. This is the minimal requirement. Often the average numbers of hours for those admitted are higher than this minimum. See [Program Statistics](#) for more information. Hours of observation is one of three factors considered for admission, thus the more hours accumulated, the better your chances of being admitted.

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## **Where can I go to get the required hours?**

Contact a local physical therapy department or clinic to arrange volunteer/ observation hours to be done under the supervision of a **Licensed PT or PTA only**. The PTA Program does not have a list of those facilities nor do we assist with arranging observational experiences. Check the yellow pages or Internet for physical therapy clinics near you. Ask for physical therapy department when you call. Some facilities are extremely flexible, allowing you to observe at your convenience. However, other clinics may be much more formal, often requiring you to complete an orientation before beginning or only permitting observation on certain days and times. Check with your local PT clinic or department for details.

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## **What if my hours are on a different form?**

Wallace State – Hanceville will accept observation hours documented on forms from other schools provided that those hours are signed/verified by a PT or PTA and include facility contact information.

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## **Will time spent as a patient in physical therapy count as observation experience?**

This is a question that only the PT or PTA who treated you can answer. If you were in a coma or a drug-induced haze and remember very little of the experience – no, those hours will not count. But, if you were alert, oriented, and

actively participating, **AND** the treating therapist agrees that those treatment sessions were a good observational experience for you, then, yes, those hours can count.

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**Is there an easier way to document my work hours as a physical therapy aide?**

Yes. Simply request that the Human Resources department print a job history report. This report will show total hours worked in physical therapy. Then, have your supervising PT or PTA sign that form. Or, your supervising PT can write a letter on company letterhead that includes the total number of hours worked as an aide under their supervision.

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**Does the program require observation hours to be completed in certain types of facilities (hospital, out-patient clinic, pediatric, etc)?**

The PTA program only requires that you have 24 hours, divided between 2 completely separate physical therapy clinics. We do not look at the type of clinic, the variety of experiences, or the number of hours spent in each. However, we do recommend that you try to experience a variety of physical therapy options. The purpose of observation hours is to help confirm that physical therapy is the right career choice for you. Thus, more variety in your experiences will give you a better idea of what physical therapy is all about. Also, it is important to realize that pediatric therapy is very different from geriatric therapy, that out-patient orthopedic patients have different challenges from in-patient (hospital) orthopedic patients, and that physical therapy can include wound care, aquatic therapy, prosthetics, and much more. A variety of observational experiences can open your eyes to the much bigger picture of what physical therapy really involves.

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**Is it necessary to get letters of recommendation in order to better my chances of being accepted into the program?**

No. Letters of recommendation are not required and will not better anyone's chances of being accepted into the program.

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**Do you require the ACT or any other special entrance exams in order to be admitted into the program?**

Yes. A minimum score of 18 on the ACT is required in order for a student to be qualified for acceptance into the PTA Program, regardless of previous education or experiences. Individuals who have completed higher degrees are not exempt from this expectation. The ACT score is one of three factors considered for admission, thus the higher the score the better your chances of being admitted. Generally, ACT scores improve after college level work, especially math and science courses. If you are planning to retake the ACT, you might consider the ACT Residual Exam offered at WSCC. This exam is the same as the national exam but is offered on-campus, allowing for a quicker release of scores. However, a residual ACT score will not transfer to another institution.

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**But I already have a bachelor's degree (or master's, etc.) – do I need to go back and take a basic college entrance exam like the ACT?**

Yes – the ACT is one of three scores that are considered for program admission. Without an ACT score your application will not be considered. However, the good news is that if you already have a degree (or even if you've already taken your prerequisites) you should be “over” prepared for the ACT.

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**What courses are required for admission into the program?**

Students are required to complete the following courses with a “C” or above in each: ORI-Orientation (a WSCC requirement. You are exempt from the Orientation (ORI) requirement if you transfer in at least 12 credit hours from another institution), ENG 101-English Composition I, Humanities Elective (the PTA Program recommends PHL 210 Ethics and the Health Sciences or SPA 101 Introductory Spanish but any three credit hour (Code ‘A’) art, music, theatre, religion, philosophy, foreign language or literature course is acceptable), PSY 200-General Psychology, PSY 210-Developmental Psychology, SPH 106-Fundamentals of Oral Communication, HIT 110-Medical Terminology, MTH 100-Intermediate College Algebra, BIO 201 & 202-Human Anatomy and Physiology I & II(prerequisite is Biology 103). A full list of up-to-date courses and their credit hours can be found in the current WSCC catalog.

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### **Are there any exceptions to these prerequisite classes?**

Students who transfer in at least 12 credit hours from another regionally accredited institution are exempt from the Orientation (ORI) requirement. Although WSCC requires BIO 103 as a prerequisite to BIO 201 and BIO 202, other institutions may not have this same requirement. If you are attending one of those institutions and plan to transfer in both BIO 201 and BIO 202, the PTA program does not expect nor require you to complete BIO 103. While the PTA program does recommend certain Humanities electives (PHL 210 Ethics and the Health Sciences or SPA 101 Introductory Spanish) any Code A, three credit hour Humanities course will substitute. Humanities courses include art (ART), music (MUS), theatre (THR), religion (REL), philosophy (PHL), humanities (HUM), foreign languages or literature courses. Also, any higher math course can be substituted for MTH 100. Please note that MTH 098, MTH 116, MTH 131, and MTH 132 are NOT higher math courses and will not substitute for MTH 100.

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### **Do I have to complete the prerequisites in one year?**

No. You may take as long as you need in order to complete the requirements for admission into the program, however, the final year of PTA Program classes must be completed within the specified 3 semester sequence. The final 3 consecutive semesters begin in the fall each year.

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### **Can the prerequisite courses be taken at any other colleges?**

Yes. Wallace State Community College in Hanceville has linkage programs with many other colleges in the state. This linkage relationship guarantees the transfer of certain specified prerequisite classes. For more information on the Linkage Program, follow the link on the PTA Program website. Even if your college is not part of our linkage program or may be out of state, courses are still transferable as long as they are equivalent to our prerequisites. Information on course equivalency may be obtained by contacting the Admissions office at 256-352-8128. A course description from your college catalog may be required. The list below includes common course substitutions from our linkage partners.

- BIO 120 Medical Terminology will transfer in for the HIT 110 Medical Terminology PTA requirement. (AL Southern, Calhoun, Central AL, Enterprise-Ozark, Gadsden State, Jeff State, Lawson State, Northeast AL, Snead State, Shelton State, Southern Union, Wallace-Selma)
- OAD 211 Medical Terminology will transfer in for the HIT 110 Medical Terminology PTA requirement. (Bevill State, Northwest Shoals)
- HPS 105 Medical Terminology will transfer in for the HIT 110 Medical Terminology PTA requirement. (Faulkner)
- OAD 204 Medical Terminology will transfer in for the HIT 110 Medical Terminology PTA requirement. (Jefferson Davis)
- The PTA program also regularly substitutes SPH 107 Fundamentals of Public Speaking for the SPH 106 Fundamentals of Oral Communication requirement.

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### **Can I substitute other courses for any of the prerequisites?**

Generally speaking, if the course name, description and credit hours are the same – even if the course number code is different – a course will usually transfer. For example, the PTA program routinely transfers in a variety of medical terminology classes (BIO 120, OAD 211, HPS 105, OAD 204) from our linkage schools. The same is true of ENG 101 English Composition I – a variety of course names and numbers are used by different institutions but every school has a 3 credit hour basic English composition course. However, regardless of the course name or number used, the course content and the credit hours must be the same for substitution. For example, PSY 210 Human Growth and Development can be found under a variety of names (Lifespan Development, Development Psychology, etc.) but it must include the full life span in the content and be 3 semester credit hours in length. Not just any random Psychology course (like Abnormal Psychology or Child Psychology) will substitute. In fact, your transcript would need to include Child Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, Adult Psychology and Psychology of Death and Dying to include all of the content found in the PSY 210 course. Ultimately the easiest way to determine equivalent course transfer is to contact a WSCC PTA advisor of the WSCC Department of Admissions.

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### **Am I required to retake the Placement Test if I am transferring in from another school and have had the English and Math requirements?**

No. If you have just graduated high school and are entering WSCC for the first time a placement test is required prior to registering for English or Math classes. Placement testing is at your convenience in our computer lab. If you are transferring in Math or English classes it is not necessary to retake the placement test.

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### **Are there additional courses for the PTA program that can be taken prior to my acceptance?**

Yes. PTA 120 Introduction to Kinesiology is available to interested students. It is strongly recommended that PTA 120 be taken prior to submitting the program application. This course is not required for program admission but does include bonus points toward the admission process based on the grade achieved. Please visit <http://pta120.posterous.com> for more information.

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### **What happened to HIT 115 – Pathophysiology and Pharmacology?**

Prior to June 1, 2011 the PTA required HIT 115 Pathophysiology and Pharmacology. That class was eliminated in 2011 to allow time for PTA 120 Introduction to Kinesiology. While still a very good course and helpful to prospective healthcare program students, it will no longer be used as a tie-breaker in the 2012 or later application process.

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### **Can I be admitted if I still have prerequisite courses to be completed?**

All prerequisites should be completed prior to the application deadline. Students who have completed all prerequisites prior to the application deadline will be considered over those applicants who are in the process of completing courses. Students who are completing prerequisite work during the term in which they are applying will only be considered on a space available basis. Currently the program is receiving more applications from individuals that have completed all prerequisites than we have space available. At this time it is highly unlikely that you will be considered for admission without having completed all prerequisites. Please see the [Program Statistics](#) link for additional details.

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### **What is the minimum GPA required for program admission?**

A minimum 2.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale is required. The GPA is one of three factors considered for admission, thus the higher the score the better your chances for admission. Keep in mind that this is a minimal requirement – currently those being admitted have a significantly higher average GPA than this score. Please see the [Program Statistics](#) link for additional details.

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### **How is the prerequisite GPA determined for program admission and what if some of the courses have been retaken?**

The prerequisite GPA considers only the grades achieved in each of the prerequisite courses. The PTA Program no longer uses a cumulative GPA. During the application process the highest grade achieved in each prerequisite class (regardless of the order in which those classes are taken) is used to determine the applicant's prerequisite GPA. To calculate your prerequisite GPA visit this website (<http://gpa.wallacestate.edu/gpa/myapp>) and input only your prerequisite grades (ENG 101, Humanities elective, SPH 106, MTH 100, BIO 201, BIO 202, PSY 200, PSY 210, and HIT 110 – Do not include orientation, BIO 103 or PTA 120 grades). A prerequisite GPA can be improved by retaking any course in which you achieved less than an "A". Every prerequisite class in which you score an "A" puts you that much closer to a 4.0 prerequisite GPA and thus the highest possible score in this category. The prerequisite GPA is the most important score in the program admission process.

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### **How do I improve my GPA?**

PTA program admission is based on your prerequisite GPA, ACT score and total hours of observation, with the prerequisite GPA being the most important of these numbers. This score is calculated using the highest grade made in each of these classes:

ENG 101 English Composition  
SPH 106 Fundamentals of Oral Communications  
HUM Humanities Elective  
MTH 100 Intermediate College Algebra  
BIO 201 Human Anatomy and Physiology I

BIO 202 Human Anatomy and Physiology II  
PSY 200 General Psychology  
PSY 210 Human Growth and Development  
HIT 110 Medical Terminology

Follow this link to calculate your current prerequisite GPA <http://gpa.wallacestate.edu/gpa/myapp> putting in only the credit hours and grades achieved in the prerequisite classes above.

A prerequisite GPA is much easier to improve than a cumulative GPA. Each prerequisite class that you retake and improve your final grade will have an immediate impact on your prerequisite GPA. Because of the highly competitive nature of the PTA program application process it is strongly recommended that you retake any prerequisite class that you made a “C” in and possibly even some of your “B” prerequisite classes. The link above will allow you to input potential grade changes to see how your prerequisite GPA will change by retaking classes and improving your grades.

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### **How many students apply to the program and how many are accepted each year?**

The number of applications submitted varies from year to year. For example, in 2011 more than 160 individuals submitted applications to the PTA Program, of which 112 had completed all admission requirements. There is not a waiting list and every qualified applicant is considered. Applications are not returned nor is any information released from application packets. Currently, the program accepts 36 students each year in the fall using a process that considers prerequisite GPA, ACT and hours of observation. More specific information is available on the [Program Statistics](#) link.

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### **Are CPR certifications, physical examinations, background checks, drug testing or any other medical testing required in order to complete an application?**

No. The required physical exam, drug testing, background screening, and CPR certification are completed after beginning the program so that each will be current and valid throughout the clinical rotations. Do not complete any of the items until formally accepted into the program and instructed to do so by the program director.

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### **What is the timeline for the admissions process?**

The Program begins accepting applications on April 1 of each year. The final deadline by which all applications must be received is June 1. Each applicant will receive a reply by mail within approximately 4 – 6 weeks, (usually around July 1) regardless of the decision made.

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### **Upon acceptance, what is the expected financial cost of the second year of study?**

A breakdown of estimated program expenses is available at [Estimated Expenses](#) link. Generally, an in-state student should anticipate a tuition/fees cost of \$5304, a book cost of \$1400, and approximately \$1000 in miscellaneous expenses. This does not include any expenses related to clinical classes. Tuition and fees for out of state students are approximately \$9477. This is an estimate and subject to change. Tuition costs are published each semester when the schedule is released – please see the WSCC website to view the current schedule.

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### **What is the length of the program?**

Ideally, the Program takes approximately 2 years to complete - 2 semesters of prerequisites and 3 semesters of major required courses. The PTA Program classes are 3 consecutive semesters and must be completed within those 3 semesters. The classes begin in the fall of each year and graduate one year later at the end of the summer term.

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### **If accepted to the PTA program, what type of class schedule can I expect in a typical week?**

The PTA student should prepare for classes that meet five days a week in the fall and spring semesters, particularly during clinical rotations. The PTA Program is not a part-time program and requires an intensive amount of studying when not in class. However, the program is currently utilizing a class schedule that reduces the total number of days a student comes to campus. For example, fall 2010 classes met on Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 am – 6:30 pm. However, during clinical education assignments students will be required to stay at their assigned facility during normal business hours which may run 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and may include time on Saturday and Sunday. Hours will vary depending on the facility.

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**When does Clinical Education Fieldwork begin and where does it take place?**

The first clinical rotation is during the last two weeks of the first program semester and a second clinical rotation is scheduled for three weeks midway through the second semester. The final semester of the program consists of 2 full-time rotations for a total of nine weeks. The program has an extensive clinical network ranging from Hanceville, Alabama to Alaska. Students are placed based on educational needs and site availability. All clinical travel expenses are the responsibility of the student.

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**Are students able to work during the program?**

Full-time employment is not recommended so that appropriate study time is available. The course load is a full-time load and a student should expect to spend 2-3 hours of study time outside of class for each credit hour in which they are enrolled. Students should contact the Office of Financial Aid at 256-352-8137 to discuss financial aid options.

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**Are all of the PTA courses held on the campus at Wallace State Community College in Hanceville?**

All of the academic course work is held at the Hanceville campus. The PTA Program's partnership with two off-campus locations (Northeast Community College in Rainsville, Alabama and Beville State Community College in Hamilton, Alabama) is currently inactive. The clinical education portion of the Program is in various health care facilities both in-state and out-of-state. Additionally, there may be field trips that require students to drive and/or carpool to a given facility within a reasonable distance of the school.

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**Is the PTA program fully accredited?**

Yes. The Program is fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). Information about accreditation can be obtained from the APTA at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org). Further contact information can be found on the [Licensure/Accreditation](#) link.

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**Will the PTA program help me if I decide to go to PT school later?**

All physical therapy programs require that you complete at least a bachelor's degree, and sometimes a master's degree, prior to admission. While many of the PTA program prerequisites and required courses may be counted toward completing your bachelor's, it is not a direct step into a PT program. Advantages of completing the PTA program prior to beginning a PT program include enhanced academic preparation, improved understanding of the profession and an excellent job to finance your future education plans. Individuals who are interested in pursuing a degree as a physical therapist should contact the school of their choice for admission requirements. A listing of accredited physical therapy programs is available through the American Physical Therapy Association website at [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org)

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**Will I be able to get a job after completing the PTA program?**

Graduates are eligible to sit for the National Physical Therapist Assistant Examination. Following successful completion of the exam, a licensed physical therapist assistant will find job opportunities nationwide. Naturally, employment opportunities fluctuate within geographic regions and practice locations. Currently a new graduate can expect a starting salary of \$35,000-58,000 annually.

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**I have heard that there are about to be changes made to the PTA curriculum/program. What changes can I expect?**

The PTA Program is constantly changing and improving to meet the demands of a dynamic marketplace. However, when changes occur in admissions standards, prerequisites or program classes, the changes are first communicated through the WSCC and PTA Program websites. It will also be published in the next WSCC catalog release. Also, changes of this type always involve a transition year in which either old or new requirements are acceptable for program admission consideration. Visit this website often for the most up-to-date information.

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**Do I need to meet with a PTA program advisor at WSCC?**

Program advisors are available by email or phone, see [Contact Link](#) for information. Individual appointments are also available. Advisors are happy to provide program information and individualized recommendations to help you successfully pursue your goal of becoming a PTA. It is strongly recommended that you correspond with a WSCC Program Advisor at least once to develop a semester-by-semester plan of classes. This is particularly true if you are attending another institution and planning to transfer in classes. Attaching a student copy of your transcripts to your email, or having a copy available during phone calls or appointments will help the advisor provide the most accurate information.

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