

Professional Licensure & Certification Exam First-time Pass Rate Improvement Plan FAMU Doctor of Physical Therapy Program

Executive Summary

The Florida A&M University (FAMU) Division of Physical Therapy offers the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) degree and is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). The program was previously reviewed by external consultants in 2013, 2019, and 2020, resulting in the DPT faculty implementing the following improvements/highlights to assist students with success on the NPTE:

1. Review of admission criteria, noting correlation of GRE score with pass rate
2. Embedded NPTE Preparatory courses in the curriculum (*Scorebuilders, TherapyED, Final Frontier*)
3. Increase use of NPTE style item-writing examinations across the curriculum (*TrueLearn*)
4. Implementation of comprehensive and clinical check-off examinations throughout the curriculum
5. Implementation of virtual tele-rehabilitation and simulation laboratory experiences
6. Increased support for faculty development

Exam Pass Rates

1. Describe the short-term strategies to improve the passage rates for recently graduated and currently enrolled students expected to take the exam in the short-term.

The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) suggests that students prepare for the exam by attending a legitimate test preparation course, purchase the PEAT or participate in group study opportunities with classmates or others. Strategies to improve NPTE passage rates include the use of *TrueLearn, Scorebuilders (with Base Camp), TherapyED, Final Frontier*, and the *NPTE Practice Examination and Assessment Tool (PEAT)*. These products are also used at programs that we utilize as benchmarks (e.g. FIU, FGCU, and UF). In 2020, we refined the use of the TrueLearn examination database (patterned after the NPTE – 200 multiple-choice questions, computerized and time-limited). This digitalized database is now used for comprehensive examinations for first- and second-year students. Student outcomes drive the development of individualized study plans, under faculty advisement. *Scorebuilders (with Base Camp)* has now been added as an in-house course during the 7th semester for this year's third-year students. In addition to a complete study guide, this modulated platform includes a library of video presentations, mobile application access and 2 NPTE styled comprehensive examinations. For the first time, the DPT program offered *Final Frontier* to third-year students during the 8th semester. This self-paced program "enjoys one of the best pass rates in the NPTE industry, even if many of the clients are high risk students." *Final Frontier* is designed to suit individual needs to pass the NPTE, follows FSBPT guidelines, and updates after each testing cycle to ensure applicability. This tool is available to students for 12 months. The *PEAT*, used to gauge NPTE readiness, is utilized as the final comprehensive exit examination from the program.

2. Describe the short-term strategies to assist students who recently failed the exam. Does the institution provide additional tutoring or financial assistance to students who fail the exam?

TherapyEd guarantees a free course re-take if a graduate is unsuccessful on the NPTE. Students who fail the NPTE are allowed to retake the two-day licensing board preparation course (*TherapyEd*) free of charge and at any location in which it is offered nationwide. Faculty advisors contact graduates to answer questions and to ensure that a study plan is in place prior to the retake. In addition, for the first time, recent graduates have access to *Final Frontier* for 9 months (after graduation).

3. Provide the overall pass rate for the last three cohorts of graduates, including information on students who retake the exam. How many students pass the exam on the 2nd attempt, 3rd attempt, etc.? How many students fail the exam twice?

From 2019 to 2021, 69 graduates took the NPTE. In 2019, 22 graduates sat for the NPTE; 19 graduates passed the NPTE on the first attempt, 3 graduates later passed, resulting in an Ultimate Pass Rate of 100%.

In 2020, 25 graduates sat for the NPTE; 22 graduates passed the NPTE on the first attempt, 1 graduate passed later, and two graduates were unsuccessful.

And, in 2021, 22 students sat for the NPTE; 18 graduates passed the NPTE on the first attempt, three graduates passed later, and 1 graduate was unsuccessful.

Table 1: FAMU NPTE Three Year Pass Rate

Graduation Year	Group	Number of Candidates	Number of Passing Candidate	FAMU Pass Rate	National Pass Rate
2021	First Time	22	18	81.8%	88.1%
	Ultimate	22	21	95.5%	96.9%
2020	First Time	25	22	88.0%	91.2%
	Ultimate	25	23	92.0%	98.8%
2019	First Time	22	19	86.4%	90.5%
	Ultimate	22	22	100%	99.4%

4. How long after graduation do students typically wait to take the exam? How many students delay taking the exam beyond a normal or typical period and why? What assistance is available who students who delay?

The Physical Therapy Licensure Exam is administered three times per year. The majority of our students graduate during the Spring Commencement and are strongly encouraged to take the NPTE at its first offering in July. Between 2019-2020, all graduates took the NPTE at the first available offering. Now and going forward, the program offers access to Scorebuilders for 6 months after graduation, and will offer Final Frontiers for 9 months after graduation, respectively.

5. Are students required to pay for any services or other support strategies provided?

Currently, students do not pay for any NPTE preparation materials. In 2020, for the first time, the program purchased the PEAT for all graduates, and we are awaiting the upcoming official NPTE report. In 2022, Final Frontier was provided for all third-year students.

Students, however, still self-fund their attendance at all professional conferences. These conferences provide value-added professional socialization opportunities, educational and networking opportunities with seasoned professionals as well as peers from other educational programs, and engagement with employers. Students also self-fund travel and housing costs for all clinical experiences in and out of the state of Florida.

6. Provide any available information on the employment outcomes of students who do not pass the exam. Do those students find employment, and if yes, what types of jobs?

Opportunities exist for graduates who do not pass the NPTE to take the NPTE for Physical Therapist Assistants. Similar to all DPT programs, the program has challenges in maintaining an accurate database of up-to-date contact information for our graduates. However, we track the employment data for successful graduates (a CAPTE requirement), but not the data for unsuccessful graduates. We have used surveys by phone, email and mail, that consistently yield low return rates. The most reliable source of

information has been the licensure data from the FSBPT, which provides the various states in which our graduates hold a license. From this data, the program is able to extrapolate our employment data.

Admissions

This section should address the admissions criteria and the extent to which they may or may not be sufficient for admitting qualified students to the program.

Admissions into the program occurs fall semester. The admission requirements used by the program remain comparable to all other DPT programs. The program continues to use Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS). This platform allows FAMU's program to select from a nationwide pool (averaging 700+ FAMU applicants with over 200+ qualified annually).

Applicants are selected based upon minimum thresholds set by the Admission Committee for prior academic performance, i.e. cumulative, last 60 credit hours, pre-requisite and science/math grade point averages (GPAs) ≥ 3.0 , and minimum 300 GRE score from ETS (Educational Testing Service). Each applicant must also provide evidence of 30 hours of physical therapy observation (10 virtual hours acceptable), submit a personal essay, and three letters of recommendation - one from a Physical Therapist. The pre-requisite course requirements are similar to medical school applicants, i.e. Biology I and II w/Lab, Human Anatomy & Physiology I and II w/Lab, Chemistry I and II w/Lab, College Physics I and II w/Lab, Statistics, General Psychology, and Human Growth & Development.

The cumulative and science GPAs are predictors of success in PT education (Vendrely, 2007), and the first- and third-year physical therapist student GPA has a strong relationship with first attempt NPTE performance (Wolden, Hill, & Voorhees, 2020). Our target goals for undergraduate GPA of at least 3.5, for both cumulative and last 60 credit hours. Average GPA data for recent cohorts are shown below.

Cohort Average Cumulative GPA

Fall 2021: 3.45

Fall 2020: 3.49

Fall 2019: 3.43

Cohort Average GPA Over Last 60 Credit Hours

Fall 2021: 3.52

Fall 2020: 3.51

Fall 2019: 3.49

Total GRE scores and quantitative scores greater than 147 were determined to be positive predictors of NPTE success. Since that time, we have gradually increased the minimum GRE requirements. We now accept students who on average possess GRE scores above the minimum required score of 300 and 147, respectively (see cohort average scores below):

Cohort Average Total GRE

Fall 2021: 300.92

Fall 2020: 302.32

Fall 2019: 303.80

Cohort Average Quantitative GRE

Fall 2021: 151.08

Fall 2020: 151.12

Fall 2019: 150.76

We will continue to review and update the GRE and GPA minimum admission requirements and track the first semester and cumulative program GPAs annually.

Curriculum

This section should describe any recent or planned curriculum reviews relative to its alignment with the content on the exam. Please note the date of the review and key changes to be made in the short-term and in the long-term.

Similar to all DPT programs, the FAMU-DPT curriculum is a lock-step curriculum that is built upon a broad foundation of liberal arts, social sciences, basic and clinical sciences. It is completed over the course of eight (8) semesters, which includes 36 weeks of full-time clinical education and five (5) weeks of part-time clinical education. Because it is a lock-step curriculum, no student is allowed to take courses out of

sequence or without completing the required course prerequisites; nor is a student permitted to enroll in an advanced level of sequential courses without having completed the lower level course(s).

The program is delivered primarily using a traditional lecture-based approach on-campus with web-based supplemental instruction to enhance student learning. Amid the pandemic, accommodations were made to best serve all students. The curriculum also has a strong emphasis on community engagement through service-learning that is consistent with the core values of the profession, CAPTE standards, and the University's mission.

Since mapping the program, the faculty recommitted to administering NPTE-like written (multiple-choice) examinations, procedures and environment for examinations in each course while providing multiple opportunities for exam practice in each course. This now includes comprehensive clinical skills check-off examinations, utilizing the School of Allied Health Sciences Simulation Laboratory. During the 7th semester, students are enrolled in Professional PT Practice, which is entirely devoted to NPTE preparation.

Comprehensive end-of-semester examinations, along with clinical skills check-off examinations, are now given during the 1st and 2nd year. Failure of these examinations will prevent progression into the semester and may delay graduation.

Student Progression

This section should describe how student progression and performance is monitored throughout the program and what strategies are in place to support students who may need additional assistance. Also include the extent to which predictive analytics is part of monitoring efforts.

Student progression and performance is monitored throughout the program. *The Minimum Grade Requirements for Promotion in the DPT Program* is similar to all DPT programs and consistent with the FAMU School of Graduate Studies and Research requirements, i.e., a cumulative GPA of 3.0 must be maintained. If a student receives a "C" grade in a course, that course may be repeated only once and only at the next time it is offered. The repeated course must carry the same course prefix, number, and description at FAMU. In the interim, a student may not enroll in any coursework related to the program. Both grades are used in computing the student's graduate GPA.

The program identifies at risk students as early as the first semester of the program if a student's GPA falls below the 3.0 minimum or earns a "C" grade in any course. The Program Director and the SPC members also monitor and track the percentage of students in each entering cohort who remain on track with the program curriculum and graduate on time (the curriculum takes three years to complete; however, CAPTE allows a 51-month maximum timeframe with cause). Earning more than 6-credit hours of "C" grades will result in dismissal from the program. The following paragraphs identify the academic support plan for at-risk DPT students.

Routine academic advisement, a program mainstay, occurs throughout each semester by assigned DPT faculty who act as advisors/mentors to small groups of 10-12 students. Mandatory intrusive advisement and the development of an individualized study plan are triggered if the student: a) receives a written notice from the course instructor that he/she is failing a course at the midterm; b) possesses a cumulative GPA < 3.0 at the end of each semester; c) is on academic probation; or d) earns a "C" grade.

The program continues to use graduate assistants as tutors for courses that were previously high-failure rate courses (PHT 5115 Gross Anatomy; PHT 5166 Neuroscience; and PHT5154 Human Physiology). Faculty also hold review sessions as needed for individual courses.

If a student fails a course, and sits out for a year, the student meets with the SPC to establish a study plan and other required activities that are applicable to the circumstances prior to returning to the program. Students may audit a course/courses previously taken, if indicated.

Faculty Support & Development

This section should describe what support and development are available to the faculty to ensure they are able to adequately support students in preparing for the exam.

Program faculty have attended various seminars conducted by the professional organization, FAMU faculty experts, and expert guest lecturers invited from other universities that address digital learning, contemporary teaching pedagogy and the design of courses by faculty. Faculty are aware that the syllabi must reflect the NPTE Blueprint and teaching methods must employ active learning strategies that reinforce knowledge retention and clinical reasoning. The University's Teaching and Learning Center will provide additional support this academic year to increase the use of active learning strategies, which will help to ensure that the core, adjunct and clinical education faculty meet program and curricular needs. Support will also be provided for faculty to attend an FSBPT course to become certified item writers for the NPTE.

We will continue our ongoing focus on ensuring that the credentials of core and associated faculty, and Clinical Instructors, are appropriate to meet the CAPTE standards and the needs of the program.

Accreditation

This section should address any recent decisions, findings, actions from the program's accreditor and/or licensing board and how the institution is addressing those issues.

The DPT program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) for the maximum timeframe of 10 years (2014 through 2024).

External Assistance

This section should describe any efforts to reach out to other institutions (SUS and non-SUS) with strong pass rates to identify best practices and obtain additional guidance and support.

As previously noted, in 2019, we surveyed successful programs in public and private universities in Florida and nationwide, such as Florida International University, Florida Gulf Coast University, University of Florida, Alabama State University (HBCU), Hampton University (HBCU), University of Maryland Eastern Shore (HBCU), and Nova Southeastern University (Private), and received insight into their approaches to admission, academic progression, and the types of exam and faculty supports that they provide for NPTE success.

We also purchase benchmark reports from the FSBPT annually, which provide comparisons of the NPTE scores for up to 10 programs. We use these various data sources to inform curricular and programmatic changes.

Additional Information (optional)

This section is optional and may be used to describe any other initiatives designed to improve exam pass rates that do not align with any of the previous section.

N/A

Additional Questions from Board Staff on 8/24/2022

When is it likely the passage rates will improve?

The DPT program anticipates improved passage rate during the upcoming testing cycle.

What efforts have taken place to understand why students are not passing the NPTE?

The DPT program has retained external consultants in 2013, 2016, and 2019 for recommendations to improve pass rate outcomes. The admission criteria are comparable to that of other SUS institutions in the state and nationwide, and the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) minimal requirement is 300. Amid the global pandemic, the program implemented experiences in tele-rehabilitation and acute simulation laboratory scenarios to enhance critical thinking skills. The program has increased utilization of NPTE style item-writing comprehensive examinations, along with clinical skills (hands-on) check-off requirements, throughout the curriculum. We now challenge our students earlier with NPTE style questions using TrueLearn SmartBank, a database specific for the profession of physical therapy. From their results, students are required, under the advisement of faculty, to develop individualized study plans. The availability of upper-leveled graduate assistants for tutoring complex course content has also increased. The program has reserved the use of three (3) nationally recognized NPTE preparatory courses (TherapyEd, Score Builders, and Final Frontier), and application of the PEAT (Practice Exam & Assessment Tool) as the exit comprehensive examination. The aforementioned tools are administered in simulation settings that parallel NPTE.