



First-Time Pass Rate Improvement Plan

**School of Allied Health Sciences
Doctor of Physical Therapy Program**

**Submitted to the
State University System of Florida
September 2, 2020**

**Pending Approval by the
FAMU Board of Trustees**

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). In 2013, the program implemented a five year (2013-2018), data driven, strategic plan to improve pass rates on the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE). In developing the plan, the program utilized various data and information sources to more accurately set benchmarks and to develop strategies that we have employed to improve students' performance on the licensure examination.

External consultants were contracted to review the program in 2013. The focus of their reviews included recommendations related to improving NPTE pass rates, curriculum, admissions, and course-level assessment. Following their recommendation, programmatic changes were made to the Division of Physical Therapy's strategic plan, program admission standards, academic progression policies for students and the curriculum. Also, in 2013 a statistician analyzed admission and program data, which provided a partial picture of the academic profile of FAMU students who were successful on the NPTE. At that time, the GRE, particularly, the quantitative score was predictive of NPTE success.

In 2016, and again in 2019, the DPT program surveyed successful programs in public and private universities in Florida and nationwide: 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). Results from the surveys and web-based queries provided insight into their approaches to admission, academic progression, and the types of exam and faculty supports that they provide for NPTE success.

In 2019 and 2020, another group of consultants were employed to assist with updating our strategic plan, to review the curriculum, and to provide an NPTE-like workshop for faculty and an NPTE test-taking strategies seminar for students. Upon review of these recommendations, DPT faculty took definitive steps to reassess efforts that we have taken thus far to improve our NPTE outcomes. Program faculty concluded that we are performing as well as other programs per our NPTE outcomes and strategies. However, we will need to continue to make necessary adjustments to the curriculum, enhance faculty development and teaching pedagogy, provide additional support to enrolled and incoming students to build their confidence and to provide adequate resources, including NPTE preparatory tools, classroom equipment and technological support to meet our students' needs and to reflect contemporary PT practice.

The program enhancements that we have implemented over the last five years have led to significant increases in NPTE first-time pass rates, increasing from 53% in 2015 to 86% in 2019. We are now focused on the continued refinement of our plan to ensure that we subsequently achieve, and consistently exceed, the national NPTE first time pass rate standard.

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.

We employ a variety of strategies to improve NPTE passage rates, several of which are modeled after best practices in use at many of the programs that we utilize as benchmarks (e.g. FIU, FGCU, and UF). Students take multiple quizzes during each course, and comprehensive exams at the end of each course each semester. All quizzes and exams are patterned after the NPTE multiple-choice questions, computerized and time limited.

Scorebuilders, TherapyEd a/k/a International Educational Resources (IER), and the *NPTE Practice Exam and Assessment Tool (PEAT)* are known NPTE preparation products that are used by all DPT programs. 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.

At FAMU, it is mandatory that students participate in the NPTE Preparatory activities that are provided by the program prior to graduation: a) a comprehensive examination (Scorebuilders promotes that its program generates a 95% NPTE pass rate), and b) a two-day licensing board preparation course (TherapyEd) at the end of the three-year curriculum. The TherapyEd course provides a review guide with test taking strategies, study materials, sample questions and answers with rationale. In 2020, for the first time, the program provided the PEAT to graduates. They are allowed to take the PEAT twice, up to a month prior to the NPTE to gauge their readiness. Data on the success of this group of students as it relates to performance on the NPTE will be assessed over the next academic year.

Another strategy that the benchmark programs have used, but one that was not previously used at FAMU will be implemented in 2020-2021. This is the administration of a comprehensive written examination (patterned after the NPTE – 200 multiple-choice questions, computerized and time-limited) that will be offered to students at the end of the 1st and 2nd year. We will use the TrueLearn examination database as the source of the questions that will be selected by the Curriculum Committee. A study plan and the opportunity to retake the exam will be offered to students who do not pass.

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.

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 2017 to 2019, fewer graduates have had to retake the NPTE. In 2017, 24 graduates sat for the NPTE; 12 graduates passed the NPTE on the first attempt, five graduates passed on the second attempt, four on the third attempt, one on the fifth attempt and one student was unsuccessful. In 2018, 23 graduates sat for the NPTE; 17 graduates passed the NPTE on the first attempt, four graduates passed on the second attempt, and two graduates were unsuccessful.

And, in 2019, 22 students sat for the NPTE; 19 graduates passed the NPTE on the first attempt and three graduates passed on the second attempt. Fifteen of the 16 graduates who voluntarily took the PEAT passed the NPTE exam on the first attempt, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: FAMU NPTE Three Year Pass Rate

Graduation Year	Group	Number of Candidates	Number of Passing Candidates	FAMU Pass Rate	National Pass Rate
2019	First Time	22	19	86.4%	90.7%
	Ultimate	22	22	100.0%	98.0%
2018	First Time	23	17	73.9%	90.9%
	Ultimate	23	21	91.3%	99.0%
2017	First Time	24	12	50.0%	92.5%
	Ultimate	24	23	95.8%	99.2%

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 four 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 June/July. Between 2017-2019, all graduates took the NPTE at the first available offering.

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. Anecdotally, all 19 graduates who took the NPTE thus far in 2020, reported they have passed the NPTE.

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.

Students are admitted to the program once annually, during the fall semester. Although, no one variable has been found in the literature to be predictive of student success on the NPTE, the admission requirements used by the program are comparable to all other DPT programs.

To achieve parity with other DPT programs in the US, incremental improvements in the academic standards (i.e. science GPA/GRE scores) for program admission began in 2014. In 2014, the program

began to use a national application platform called the Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS), which is used by most DPT programs. This platform allows FAMU's program to select from a nationwide pool (averaging 700+ FAMU applicants with over 200+ qualified annually). We have since modified the minimum admissions requirements annually, and the admission committee ranks applicants and chooses the top 25 each year.

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 grade point averages (GPAs) ≥ 3.0 , and minimum 300 GRE score from ETS (Educational Testing Service). Each applicant must also provide evidence of 20 hours of physical therapy observation or work experience, 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, and General Psychology.

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). The Physical Therapist Education Programs Aggregate Program Data Report (CAPTE, 2019) shows the average GPA of DPT students enrolled in public institutions was 3.66 in 2017; 3.67 in 2018 and 3.65 in 2019. Similarly, the minimum GRE is 300 total. We have established 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 2020: 3.49
Fall 2019: 3.43
Fall 2018: 3.44
Fall 2017: 3.5

Cohort Average GPA Over Last 60 Credit Hours

Fall 2020: 3.51
Fall 2019: 3.49
Fall 2018: 3.41
Fall 2017: 3.5

A statistical analysis conducted in 2013 identified a correlation between GRE scores and NPTE pass rates for FAMU graduates. For example, 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 2020: 302.32
Fall 2019: 303.80
Fall 2018: 302.18
Fall 2017: 301.4

Cohort Average Quantitative GRE

Fall 2020: 151.12
Fall 2019: 150.76
Fall 2018: 151.45
Fall 2017: 149.6

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 curriculum utilizes a hybrid model with five integrated themes: 1) Foundational Sciences; 2) Research /Critical Inquiry; 3) Professional Roles/Health Care Systems; 4) Clinical Sciences; and 5) Clinical Education. The program is delivered primarily using a traditional lecture-based approach on-campus with web-based supplemental instruction to enhance student learning. 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.

In 2013, the curriculum was mapped in anticipation of a continuing accreditation site visit by CAPTE. Further updates were made to the curriculum due to an update to the CAPTE standards in 2016. This particular revision resulted in modifications to align curriculum content to the NPTE Test Blueprint, and to improve the scope and sequence for better integration from course to course in an effort to increase student retention. The program determined that student knowledge of content could be enhanced by scaffolding content such that the clinical science coursework builds upon the basic sciences presented in the first two semesters of the curriculum. As part of the curriculum modification, program faculty used this opportunity to further align course objectives, learning objectives, teaching strategies and assessments with the CAPTE standards to increase the transparency of relevant content that are critical to NPTE success and individual student learning within each course. Additionally, 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.

The PHT 6960 Professional PT Practice course is entirely devoted to NPTE preparation, with modules and associated examinations patterned after the NPTE and test-taking strategies. A comprehensive exam at the end of the third year addresses all curricular content provided over the three-year curriculum. Students have opportunities to retake the comprehensive exam. After two unsuccessful attempts, students must petition the Student Progress Committee (SPC). Successful passing of the third-year comprehensive exam is a requirement for graduation (if a student fails the third-year comprehensive examination, the student does not graduate).

For the cohort graduating in 2020, the program shored up the cadre of preparatory resources and practice examinations prior to the NPTE. These activities included funding the PEAT, providing an additional examination preparation boot camp prior to taking the NPTE, and providing a tutor to assist with NPTE content preparation. The Curriculum Committee will review course evaluations by faculty and students, the most recent NPTE scores, comprehensive examinations, and FSBPT Graduate Performance, Benchmark and Content Area Reports to determine where gaps continue to exist.

In 2021, we are developing a common rubric that may be modified and used throughout the curriculum to assess mastery of content and competencies for all clinical lab course examinations. This year will serve as a pilot for the 1st and 2nd year-end comprehensive exams. If these exams are shown to be reliable, the program will require students to pass these examinations to progress to full-time clinicals beginning with the 2022-2023 academic year. Failure will prevent progression into the next year and prevent graduation.

We will use the enhanced capabilities of FAMU's learning management system, Canvas, for practical examinations, and video options for grading and skills performance reviews with students. The program will also continue to provide students with early exposure to real patients to reinforce didactic knowledge and clinical reasoning.

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.

Note, a “C” grade may cause the cumulative GPA to fall below the 3.0 minimum requirement. If a student’s graduate cumulative GPA falls below 3.0, documentation of the Academic Status (Probation) will be permanently imprinted on the student’s university transcript. The purpose of probation is to: 1) provide the student with clear guidelines of the performance that will be necessary to return to good standing; and 2) explicitly provide notice to the student of “reasonable time” to meet these expectations. Additionally, a student on probation must meet with the Student Progress Committee (SPC), which provides a letter to the Director stating the reasons for the probation and identifying the steps necessary for the student to return to good standing by the end of the probationary period (the subsequent semester). This letter is reviewed/amended (as appropriate) and endorsed by the Director then sent to the student for signature.

A student, who is on Academic Probation, must also meet with the Program Director and the student’s Advisor, at the start of the following semester, to review the student’s educational plan as a preventative measure to increase the student’s chance of success in the program. Modifications of the plan may be made, as necessary, so that the student and the Director will know the conditions required for the continued enrollment of the student in the program. Both the student and the Program Director sign the plan.

Additionally, a maximum of two courses may be repeated if a “C” grade is received. Earning a “C” grade in the same course twice will also result in dismissal from the program. The following paragraphs identify the academic support plan for at-risk DPT students.

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).

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.

Since 2014, the program has also successfully used and 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). These courses no longer have a high failure rate and our graduation rate was 92% in 2019 (the CAPTE standard is 80%). 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.

Effective in 2020, each physical therapy student must receive a satisfactory passing (“A” or “B”) grade in every course, including the clinical education courses, to be recommended by the SPC for participation in clinical education, continued matriculation, promotion (from Year 1 to Year 2, and from Year 2 to Year 3) and graduation.

The program is working with Exam Master to beta test a pre-matriculation preparation test for accepted program applicants. These modules with associated exams, which take ~ 20 hours to complete, address knowledge of content, time management and critical thinking. The faculty will use the analysis of results to identify gaps in student knowledge prior to matriculation to better tailor instruction. It should also help incoming students to be better organized and prepared for the upcoming three years of the DPT program.

The program will also continue to strengthen and enhance alumni relationships, including mentorship opportunities and will continue to explore opportunities to strengthen and build relationships with clinical partners to increase support and opportunities for further skills development and practice.

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 noted above, in 2016, and again 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.

Additionally, the Florida DPT Program Directors meet weekly (since COVID-9) to support each other and to discuss and share ideas via Zoom. Likewise, the FAMU Director of Clinical Education is a member of the Florida Consortium of Clinical Educators, which meets regularly to address issues, ideas and logistical challenges surrounding clinical education practices.

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