



Memorandum

To: Dr. Christy England, Vice Chancellor, Academic & Student Affairs, Florida Board of Governors
From: Dr. Ralph Wilcox, Provost & Executive Vice President, University of South Florida
Date: August 27, 2020
Subject: Licensure Passage Rates for the USF Doctor of Physical Therapy Program

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 Ralph Wilcox
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In 2018, the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) published a new blueprint for the National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE) resulting in a progressive decline in U.S. first-time pass rates from 2017 to 2019 (92.5, 90.9, and 90.8 passing, respectively). Although USF's Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students have performed at or above national averages, we have been concerned with the recent decline in our reported pass rates. Thus, faculty in the School of Physical Therapy & Rehabilitative Science implemented strategies starting in AY 2019-20 to address this pattern, including curricular revision, enhanced NPTE preparation, and improved admissions screening processes.

Curricular Revisions: The NPTE includes clinically focused questions from the Cardiovascular & Pulmonary (CVP), Musculoskeletal, Nervous, Integumentary, and other systems. In 2017, we identified that our students were spending approximately 25% of their total credit hours on basic science content, which was more than double that of peer institutions, while we had less focus on physical therapy practice. The NPTE emphasizes physical therapy diagnostic examination, evaluation, differential diagnosis, prognosis, and interventions. In 2018, we revised and enhanced our basic science content to have greater clinical relevance for the 2021 cohort. Furthermore, we identified an opportunity for improvement in student performance on the Cardiovascular & Pulmonary content of the NPTE. National experts in CVP PT education provided consultation and input into our pending curricular revision. They also mentored new faculty who were hired in 2019 based on their CVP clinical expertise. We pursued and received CAPTE approval for a curricular revision in April of 2020 and implemented this revision for the class entering Fall 2020. In addition, our remediation policies were strengthened while our minimum passing grade was increased from 70-75%.

Enhanced NPTE preparation: In 2019, we enhanced our student licensure examination preparation by implementing a practice exam (*Practice Exam & Assessment Tool* (PEAT) and providing additional test-preparation resources (*Virtual PT, WebPT, and PhysioU*). The PEAT is a timed, computer-based, multiple-choice practice exam developed by the FSBPT for NPTE candidates. Many PEAT questions are retired NPTE items and is a predictor of students' NPTE performance. These practice exams are given in Spring (Year 2) and Fall (Year 3) prior to terminal clinical education experiences. If students do not achieve a competency threshold score on the practice exam, as part of a course, they must complete a structured remediation to progress in the program. Since implementing this competency assessment and threshold for program progression for the 2021 cohort, we have seen an approximately 8% increase in mean PEAT scores when compared to 2019 and 2020 cohorts. We expect higher performance on the NPTE as students have an additional seven months of clinical education following the Fall exam. We have continued our licensure review course at the end of our program and have added *Scorebuilders Basecamp*, which provides a structured review and facilitates mastery of critical core content.

Improved Admissions Screening Process: Starting with the 2022 cohort, a new admissions process was implemented with the addition of a GRE requirement. GRE scores for verbal and quantitative measures (verbal GRE, quantitative GRE) have been identified as reliable measures for assessing a physical therapy candidate's academic potential during the admission screening process. Also, it is important to note that our *US News & World Report's* national ranking increased from 79 to 49 this past year, which should attract more qualified students.

Summary: USF DPT students continue to perform at or above national averages on first time licensure pass rates. However, in our pursuit of excellence, starting in 2018, the School of Physical Therapy & Rehabilitative Sciences identified opportunities and initiated a plan to improve student performance, including curricular revision, enhanced test preparation, and more rigorous admissions processes. While we anticipate that these actions will result in a change in the trajectory of performance for our licensure passage rates on the National Physical Therapy Examination, it should be noted that the data reported annually in the Accountability Plan reflect a rolling 3-year average. Given the rolling average, combined with the fact that the implementation of the changes will only be fully in effect once our 2022 cohort of students is admitted; and, with uncertainty in regard to the impact of the present pandemic on our current students, we do not anticipate an immediate reversal of the trend. However, we do expect continued performance above the national average and remain committed to the success of all of our DPT students.

cc: Ms. Emily Sikes, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives & Economic Development, BOG
 Drs. Charles Lockwood, Terry Chisolm, Javier Cuevas, and Douglas Haladay, USF

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