

# ***Physical Therapist Assistant***

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **Dear Prospective Physical Therapist Assistant Student:**

We are pleased that you have indicated your interest in the Physical Therapist Assisting Program. This "Question and Answer" page will give you information about the program. It may also raise additional questions that can be answered during a counseling session or by contacting the Physical Therapist Assisting faculty in the Division of Allied Health and Nursing (Ext. 7881 or 7210).

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### **What is a Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA)?**

Physical therapist assistants work under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist. Their duties include assisting the physical therapist in implementing treatment programs according to the plan of care, training patients in exercises and activities of daily living, conducting treatments, using special equipment, administering modalities and other procedures, and reporting to the physical therapist on the patients' responses.

### **What is the PTA Program at LCCC?**

The curriculum for the physical therapist assisting program consists of a combination of didactic and clinical learning experiences. Courses in the professional portion of the program include instruction in assessment and examination techniques, wound care, developmental activities, postural training and body mechanics as well as various exercise techniques used in rehabilitation. Other professional courses include the use of physical agents that assist in healing and pain control including sound, light, electricity and water.

The physical therapist assisting program includes hands-on practice on campus as well as clinical rotations in the community. Clinical rotations are designed to give the student the opportunity to work with a number of medical diagnoses in acute care, rehabilitation, out-patient and long term care settings while being supervised by a clinical instructor.

Other courses which physical therapist assistant students must complete include anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, and general education courses that lead to the students' respective Associate of Applied Science degree awarded by the college.

Licensure or registration is required in most states for the physical therapist assistant to practice. Graduates from an accredited program must obtain at least a certain specified minimum passing score on a licensure exam. This passing score is the same across all jurisdictions in the country, so that passing the licensing exam in any state/jurisdiction gives the graduate the opportunity to apply for a license in any state. Some states require additional tests or educational requirements in order to

apply for, or transfer a license to that state. For example, Ohio requires the successful completion of a test of knowledge of the laws and rules governing the practice of Physical Therapy in the state of Ohio in order to become licensed or transfer a license in the state. Complete information on practice acts can be obtained from the state licensing boards

A graduate from the program will be prepared for employment in hospitals, outpatient clinics, schools, home care, and extended care facilities.

**Can I take longer than two years to complete the PTA courses?**

The professional courses follow closely in content and must be taken in five consecutive semesters. Many students choose to complete as many of the non-professional courses (e.g. English, psychology, physics) as possible before starting the PTA courses in order to better focus their energy on the PTA courses if they are accepted into the program, which may extend the length of the time it takes to complete the degree. However the entire curriculum of PTA courses and non-professional courses can be taken simultaneously, and can be completed in 5 semesters when taken in the sequence suggested in the curriculum guide.

**Is there a ranking of PTA programs?**

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is the national organization that represents physical therapy. The APTA does not rank programs. Physical therapy programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) which assures quality in physical therapy education. LCCC's PTA program is accredited by CAPTE.

**Will graduating as a physical therapist assistant prepare me to continue my education and become a physical therapist?**

Both physical therapy and physical therapy assistant students must complete courses such as anatomy, kinesiology, and general education courses that lead to the students' respective degrees. The difference in the physical therapist's education is the depth of theory provided during the mandatory advanced course work in anatomy, physiology, physics, research, pathophysiology, neurology, and pharmacology. In many cases, additional courses will have to be taken in the professional areas. Any plans to continue your education in the field of physical therapy should be discussed with an Allied Health and Nursing counselor. Graduates of the PTA program can complete a Bachelor's degree in Applied Science with a major in Allied Health through the University Partnership Program at LCCC, or other appropriate bachelor programs enabling them to apply to a PT program, providing they make sure to meet the necessary entry prerequisites for the PT program at the school they wish to attend. Graduates may pursue Physical Therapy Doctoral degrees, but it is their responsibility to investigate the accepting college or university requirements.

**Are there prerequisites that must be taken before being accepted into the program?**

There are mandatory courses that must be taken in order to graduate; however, the program is designed to allow for these courses to be taken at the same time as the professional PTA courses while you are in the program. Because of the amount of information in the professional courses many students choose to complete as many of the non-technical courses as possible prior to entering the professional courses in

the program. A list of these courses can be obtained from your counselor or the Division of Allied Health and Nursing.

### **Will my credits from another college or university transfer to LCCC?**

For Non-technical or general education courses, an official evaluation of transfer credit will not be completed until the student has been admitted to LCCC, has submitted official transcripts from all attended post-secondary institutions and has completed an LCCC Transcript Evaluation Request form. A student wishing to enroll prior to the receipt of official post-secondary transcript(s) is subject to the same requirements as any entering student as described in the LCCC Catalog.

Only credits and hours are transferable; transfer grade point averages and/or grades do not replace LCCC grades on the official LCCC transcript. Transfer credit is granted for college-level and some technical courses earned at regionally accredited institutions of higher education for which students receive a grade of "C" or higher. Credit received on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory or credit/no credit basis will be evaluated using the same process as graded courses. LCCC translates satisfactory or credit as the equivalent of the student having passed the class.

A transfer student who is under academic probation at another college or university may be admitted as a Probationary Student. A student's record is subject to review by the Committee on Admissions and Scholastic Standing.

Steps to admission include:

1. Complete all LCCC admission procedures *prior to* requesting evaluation of college level and/or military transcripts.
2. Complete and return the Transcript Evaluation Request form to the LCCC Records Office. Each Transcript Evaluation Request is valid for three months from the date of receipt. If transcripts are not received within the three month time limit, your future ability to register for LCCC classes may be limited or denied.
3. You are required to request an official transcript from the appropriate official of each separate institution of higher education attended. Complete a Request for Official Transcript form (included in the Transcript Evaluation Request form) for each institution you attended. This includes;
  - In-state college transcripts
  - Out-of-state college transcripts
  - International transcripts
  - Military transcripts
  - AP/CLEP transcripts
4. The transferability of credit is awarded by the LCCC Transfer Center office.
5. You will receive a Notification of Credit Accepted letter from the LCCC Transfer Center when your evaluation is completed. Your evaluation becomes part of your permanent student achievement file.

For courses in the major field (PTA) to transfer, they must be from an accredited PT or PTA program (CAPTE if USA, or appropriate accrediting agency if other country) and an accredited college or university recognized by the USDE (or similar agency appropriate to the country). Other health care/degree programs (e.g. exercise physiology, kinesiology, athletic science, massotherapy, etc.) are not acceptable. The coursework in question was completed with a grade of "C" or better and is no more than 5 years old. Students must apply in writing for the credit, providing sufficient evidence (copies of transcripts, college catalogs, syllabi from previous institutions, etc) to demonstrate mastery of at least 80% of the content area of an equivalent LCCC PTA course. This may be accomplished by combining more than one course from the original institution (e.g. two or three courses from the original institution may be used to demonstrate mastery of the material from an LCCC course.) Students will be counseled regarding the content area of the LCCC course and

offered the opportunity to take time to obtain and review course materials on their own. Students must arrange to take, and pass at a score of 70% or higher, a written comprehensive examination covering the content area of the course for which credit is desired. If the course also includes a laboratory component, students will also be asked to complete a practical exam component, with a passing score of 75% or better. Courses that are prerequisite courses for a later course in a sequence must be completed by either the transfer method or traditional methods in order before progressing to the next course in the sequence.

### **What factors should I use in deciding on a school?**

The decision to attend a physical therapist assisting program is a very personal one which must be made on the basis of a variety of factors, such as:

- Geographic location and size of the school
- Cost
- Class size
- Faculty composition and cohesiveness
- Degree awarded; design and length of curriculum

### **Are there positions available in the field of physical therapy?**

Throughout the history of physical therapy in the United States, there has been a shortage of qualified physical therapists and physical therapist assistants. Currently, PT and PTA graduates are in great demand, however no assurance is given that this trend will continue.

The American Physical Therapy Association has worked hard over the years to improve physical therapy education, research, and practice, making the field an accessible and favorable field of choice. Additionally, many factors have positively influenced the physical therapy profession.

One factor affecting the need for physical therapy services is the changing makeup of the population. As the "baby boom" generation ages, physical therapists and physical therapist assistants will be in demand to treat patients who are affected with arthritis, stroke, heart disease, and other prolonged-care conditions common to older adults.

As a consequence of societies' increasing participation in sports and fitness activities, more PTs and PTAs may be needed in the health care system to treat and help prevent musculoskeletal injuries.

### **How do the salary and benefits compare to other professions?**

Most full time employers in the health care field offer a lucrative benefit package including medical coverage, paid vacation, continuing education, and retirement plans. Specific benefits should be discussed with the prospective employer. The estimated starting salaries for physical therapist assistants in this area varies between \$38,000 to \$54,000 per year based on practice setting.

### **How are students selected for the program?**

The application process for admission to the college is detailed in the current annual college catalog as well as the current semester curriculum guide. Please see the information on admissions online, available through the following link:

<http://www.lorainccc.edu/Academic+Divisions/Allied+Health+and+Nursing/AlliedHealthNursingAd>

[missions.htm](#) All prospective PTA students must be admitted to the College through the normal procedures noted there. Additional information or questions can be addressed to the Connections Center at ext. 4032. Additionally, PTA students must make application for selective admission to the Physical Therapist Assistant Program by filing a valid Program Application with the Connections Center by Nov 15<sup>th</sup> of the year before they wish to enter the program. Initially, 40 students will be selected from the pool of Program Applications filed with the Connections Center. From those 40, the final 20 will be selected.

Criteria for final selection (20 students) and their point values includes the following:

- Grade point average (Average GPA 1998 was 3.2) (maximum 20 points)
- Completion of volunteer/observation hours (required, but = 0 points)
- Recommendations from volunteer/observation site coordinator (maximum 1 point)
- Completion of program support classes (maximum 2 points)
- A group interview by the PTA faculty (maximum 4 points)
- Self narrative (maximum 4 points)

The College reserves the right to modify the selection criteria and to consider additional information or criteria. The program and college alone control all enrollment criteria, and are not, by nature or policy, permitted to be unduly unfairly influenced by any outside party including any graduate, employer, advisory committee member, accrediting body, individual, or other stakeholder. The program does reserve the right to selectively market to and encourage recruitment of those populations deemed underserved by the profession or community, and to help promote cultural diversity in the field.

In the case of a tie for the last slot(s), the earliest date on the Program Application will be the determining factor.

**Is the program offered in the evening or on weekends?**

The program is only offered during the day, on a typical Monday to Friday academic week. Occasionally, some early evening hours may be required of a student during an internship experience.

**Will I have to attend school in the summer?**

Because of the amount of information that has to be covered, it is necessary to schedule classes during the summer semester between the first and second year of the program.

**How much actual patient contact will I have during the program?**

There are three clinical affiliations scheduled as a part of the PTA program. During this time students will have patient contact under the direct supervision of an assigned clinical instructor. The first two clinical rotations are part time and are scheduled during the summer semester year 1 and fall semester year 2. The third clinical is full time and is scheduled during the spring semester of the second year. Students are required to abide by the hours and policies of the clinical agency at which they are placed.

Student preference will be based on availability and the program goal of providing a well-rounded clinical education.

**Will I do all of my clinical training at one site?**

The clinical rotations are designed to give experience in many areas. For this reason, a different site is normally assigned for each clinical experience, and sites are selected so that students attend a minimum of three different clinical facility employers. Sites are assigned based on clinical instructor availability, individualized learning needs of the student, the type of clinical rotation (at a minimum a long-term care and acute care rotation are required by the program) and other factors designed to best prepare the student as a competent PTA. While student input into clinical site selection is encouraged, scheduling is not based on distance or convenience, student work or home life circumstances, or strictly on student preference but instead on providing the best possible educational experience. Students who are/have been employed by a particular clinical site are not placed with that same employer or facility/facilities for clinical internships.

**Is transportation to the clinical sites provided?**

No. Students must provide their own transportation. Since there are multiple clinical sites, car-pooling will be difficult. Students may be required to pay for parking at various facilities. Driving will be required to the clinical sites, potentially up to one hour.

**Are criminal background checks required?**

Fingerprinting is normally done for PTA students late in Spring Semester so that the results would be good for a year and carry students through the end of clinical practicum courses. Fingerprinting would be performed on campus through campus security services, though some clinical sites may also perform their own testing. Faculty and staff would not normally have access to the results, except for certain select clinicals that REQUIRE the program to review the results and determine if a student can be sent to the site or not, and in the cases of a positive result. If you are denied placement by a clinical site because of a fingerprint background check, a frank and confidential discussion about the reason for the testing failure would be necessary. A student who fails the testing based on the identified list or any facility's guidelines, will be unable to continue to progress through the program. A student who cannot be placed into a clinical site due a testing failure will be unable to complete the clinical practicum requirements for the program, and therefore will be unable to continue in the program sequence.

Students accepted into the program will be informed when the background checks will be done, and do not need to obtain the background testing on their own prior to entry.

**Does the college have baby-sitting service?**

Yes. Inquiries should be made at the childcare center, extension 4038.

**Can I work while I am in the program?**

A general college guideline indicates that a student taking 12 or more hours (full-time) may work a maximum of 15 to 20 hours per week. Most PTA students find that it is difficult to work large numbers of hours while they are in the program. In addition, during some semesters, the academic and clinical load requires up to 40 hours per week of attendance during the day at classes, labs and/or clinicals, making daytime work impossible to maintain during those semesters. During those 40 hour/week semesters, considering the hours of education, and required study hours, many students find any significant work hours to be a difficult burden. Experience

has shown that those students who attempt to complete the program while working a significant number of hours are often unsuccessful academically and fail to complete the program, or may be unsuccessful in attempting to pass their license exam.

**Are there jobs available in the field, that I can do while in the program?**

Some students like to work in a physical therapy department while pursuing a degree in the field. This has some benefits as well as potential limitations. First, Ohio law (as well as insurance reimbursement) severely limits what a person without a license may do in the field. Without a PT or PTA license (or a related license), those persons working in an "Unlicensed Personnel" capacity are limited by law to duties such as care of equipment, transporting, clerical duties, assisting a patient preparing for treatment, or acting as a second set of hands for a PT/PTA currently working with a patient. Second, while there is a benefit from being able to observe therapy in action, there can also be a potential downfall if observing therapy which may not be performed as it must be instructed by an accredited education program.

**How many hours of outside studies will I need per week?**

You may find the information provided in each PTA class to be difficult and challenging. On an average, students need two to five hours of outside study for each hour in class. Anecdotally, most student report 20-40 hours per week spent reading and studying during the program, outside of class time.

**What suggestions do you have that would increase my likelihood of being successful in the physical therapist assistant program?**

Make up any deficiencies you have in the basic skills of reading, math, writing and science. Your counselor is available to help you with these decisions. We recommend making an appointment with one of the Allied Health Programs Counselors in Enrollment Services, at 440-366-4033.

Take as many of the academic support courses as possible before entering the program. If it is not possible to take all of the courses, try to get as many of the science courses out of the way as possible.

It is recommended that students complete their science sequence requirements no more than one academic year prior to admission to the program as possible. Also, it is required that students achieve a "C" or better in their science and mathematics courses.

Students who are still in high school and placing their name in the program pool for the PTA program should consider the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program or Credit in Escrow program as a way of taking a few academic courses at the College while they are still in high school. This should be discussed with your high school counselor and/or the Colleges' Allied Health and Nursing counselor.

**During the selection process, 40 volunteer or observation hours are required. Where should I do them, and when?**

Almost all the physical therapy departments in the region accept observers, or volunteers. Hospitals, private clinics/practices, skilled nursing facilities, all are known to take students for their hours. You can pick a facility that interests you and give their physical therapy department a call to arrange the observation experience. If you have very little familiarity with the field, splitting the hours between 2 facilities

might be a good idea, as the type of physical therapy you see one place may look very different from the therapy in another facility.

We typically do not recommend that you complete the 40 hours until after you have made it to the point in the selection process of the interview. During the interview is when the form necessary to verify the hours is given. However, we do encourage you to thoroughly investigate the field before applying to the program. Talk to some PT's and PTA's. Visit several departments to see what therapy looks like. Go to [www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org) and read about the field. There are several introductory books on the field available at the library.

### **Is financial aid available for Physical Therapist Assistant students?**

Financial aid is available to qualified students through the Financial Aid Office. Allied Health and Nursing students are urged to make inquiry to determine if they are eligible.

Some facilities offer students a contract to pay for their education in return for some period of time to be spent working for the employer after graduation. The American Physical Therapy Association House of Delegates offers a set of guidelines to "assist students/new graduates in negotiating appropriate agreements to provide financial assistance in exchange for a promise of future employment. They suggest that all students and new graduates obtain appropriate legal counsel prior to signing any agreement. In addition, the guidelines list provisions that employment agreements should include and "set forth in clear language" associated with repayment, termination of employment, and non-compete clauses." (APTA House of Delegates)

The PTA program is in full support of the language and spirit of the APTA House of Delegate Guidelines. The guidelines can be found online at:  
[http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Policies\\_and\\_Bylaws1&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=52487](http://www.apta.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Policies_and_Bylaws1&Template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=52487)

**Statement of Non-Discrimination:** Lorain County Community College prohibits discrimination against individuals. The College and the PTA program support provisions of law specifying nondiscrimination based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, marital status, child-bearing status, handicap or sexual orientation in administration of its admission policies, employment practice, federal and state financial aid programs, procurement activities and other College administered programs.

### **What accommodations are there for students with special needs?**

The Office for Special Needs exists to serve the needs of students with disabilities - physical, learning and/or emotional. If you are a person with a disability who needs accommodations or assistance, contact the O.S.N.S.