

Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Admissions

Frequently Asked Questions

The day you submit your application is the day your academic journey begins with us. Below you'll find answers to the questions we hear most often from prospective applicants. If you don't see what you're looking for, feel free to reach out to the Admissions Chair.

Program Mission & Holistic Admissions

What is a holistic, or mission-aligned, admissions process?

A holistic admissions process uses the program's mission to define merit and to identify the competencies, personal and professional attributes, and experiences that align with our program's goals and readiness expectations. It emphasizes individualized review and a strategic, evidence-based approach that considers test scores, grades, experiences, and applicant context together, in order to identify the applicants most likely to thrive in the program and contribute to our mission.

What is the program's mission, and what personal and professional attributes are you looking for in applicants?

The mission of the Department of Physical Therapy at TSU is to graduate competent, entry-level physical therapists who demonstrate cultural competence, apply research evidence to practice, uphold the Code of Ethics, value lifelong learning, and engage in professional and community service.

When reviewing applications, we look for evidence of the following professional attributes, interpersonal skills, and personal characteristics:

- Communication
- Professionalism
- Ethical decision-making
- Empathy
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Adaptability
- Sound judgment

What qualities or experiences make applicants most competitive for admission?

No single quality or experience defines a strong candidate. We look for the personal and professional attributes listed above, and we actively seek diverse backgrounds in every cohort. What we really want is for applicants to be their true, authentic selves while putting their best foot forward. Don't try to be what you think we want; just show us who you are.

Are leadership, professional work experience, and community involvement considered during admissions review?

Absolutely. As mentioned above, we consider the full picture of who you are, and we genuinely value diverse experiences and backgrounds across all of our applicants.

Applying to the Program

Where do I find the TSU Physical Therapy website and application portal?

You can find our program information at tnstate.edu/pt/admission.aspx, and you can view and apply through our PTCAS directory listing at ptcasdirectory.apta.org.

When can I apply, and what is the deadline?

We accept applications each cycle through PTCAS, typically opening in the summer with a fall deadline. Because exact dates can shift slightly from year to year, please confirm the current cycle's opening and deadline dates on PTCAS and our program website before you begin.

GPA & Academic Requirements

What is the minimum required GPA?

Our minimum required GPA is a 3.0, for both the prerequisite GPA and the overall GPA. Meeting this minimum is required to qualify for an interview invitation. That said, this is a minimum threshold, not the average for our applicant pool. Some research suggests that GPAs below a 3.4 can be associated with greater challenges in professional programs such as ours, so we encourage applicants to keep that in mind when self-evaluating. We believe in creating successful pathways for all students, and we have welcomed students with GPAs across the full 3.0 to 4.0 range in every past cohort.

How does the program evaluate upward GPA trends or applicants rebuilding their GPA through prerequisite coursework?

Trends are absolutely taken into consideration, though overall and prerequisite GPA averages are still the primary numbers we calculate. In some cases, we take a closer look at how an applicant is trending now versus when they struggled earlier in their academic career. That said, trends do not always tell the whole story: it can be easier to earn an A in a single course when you aren't juggling other classes at the same time, and that increased cognitive load of taking classes concurrently is much more representative of the graduate school experience. We keep that context in mind during review.

Prerequisites & Coursework

Prerequisite coursework ensures every applicant enters the program with the foundational scientific knowledge needed for the rigor of the DPT curriculum, and it helps us apply a consistent standard across the wide range of undergraduate institutions, grading scales, and course rigor represented in our applicant pool.

What are the required prerequisite courses, and can I apply without completing all of them?

Yes, you can apply without completing all of your prerequisites. The required prerequisite areas are:

- **Anatomy & Physiology:** Two-course sequence in Anatomy & Physiology I and II with lab.
 - Or one course in anatomy with lab **AND** one course in physiology with lab.
 - An anatomy course with dissection is preferred but not required.

- **Biological Sciences (Biology):** Two courses in biological sciences (Biology not botany) with lab, at or above the level of General Biology I and II.
- **Chemistry:** Two courses in general chemistry with lab, at or above the level of General Chemistry I and II.
- **Physics:** Two courses in general physics with lab, at or above the level of General Physics I and II.
 - Non-calculus physics is accepted.
- **Psychology:** One course offered through a Psychology department.
 - Generally, PSY or PSYCH will be in the course prefix.
- **Research/Statistics:** One introductory-level course in research and/or statistics for research methodology.

We also recommend, though do not require, the following coursework to help prepare you for the DPT curriculum:

- Medical terminology

Do you accept or International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP) classes taken in high school?

Yes, we accept AP and IB coursework toward prerequisites. Ideally, this credit will appear on your undergraduate transcript and count toward your undergraduate degree. If it does not appear on your transcript, we require official proof of your score from the College Board (a score of 4 or 5). All AP/IB science courses used toward prerequisites must include a lab component, consistent with the College Board's requirement that at least 25% of instructional time in AP science courses be lab-based.

Do you have a limit on how many prerequisite courses I can still have in progress, or not yet taken, at the time I submit my application?

At the time of the application deadline, you may have no more than three science prerequisite courses still in progress or planned in that fall term. In addition, no more than one prerequisite course may remain to be completed in the spring term prior to summer matriculation.

If you have a course in progress or planned after you submit your application, mark it as “in progress” or “planned” in PTCAS. Your application will still be verified and reviewed at that time. You'll then need to complete an Academic Update in PTCAS (available between fall and spring semesters, and again between spring and summer semesters) so we can confirm that you completed and passed those courses. All prerequisite courses must be successfully completed with satisfactory grades prior to matriculation; if an admitted applicant is ultimately unable to do so, their offer of admission may be subject to reconsideration and rescinded.

For a complete list of required prerequisite courses, please refer to the above.

Do you have any limits on how many times I can retake a prerequisite course, or how long ago it can have been completed?

We recognize that not every applicant follows a traditional academic timeline, and we're glad to support non-traditional students as they work toward completing their prerequisites. We don't set a limit on how many times you can retake a prerequisite course, though we do take note when a prerequisite science course (anatomy, for example) has been repeated several times.

We also don't have a strict expiration date for prerequisite coursework, but we do ask that it be completed within the past 10 years so you can demonstrate current, relevant knowledge in the sciences. Coursework completed outside that window may still be considered, but it is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

During our application review process our admissions committee takes a closer look at your prerequisite course GPA and takes this into consideration separately from your overall GPA. If this GPA is low, we'll take a closer look at the pattern behind it. For instance, if an applicant only took one science course at a time and still posted a low science GPA, that's something we'd flag for closer review.

GRE Requirements

What do I need to score on the GRE?

There is no minimum required GRE score, and no limit on how many times you may take the exam to achieve your best performance. We recommend aiming for at least 150 on both the Quantitative and Verbal sections.

Why does your program still require the GRE?

While several programs have moved away from requiring this exam, we still ask applicants to complete it because there is strong evidence linking GRE performance to how students perform academically in their first year of a PT program, as well as their performance on the National Physical Therapy Examination ("Boards" Exam) following their PT education. This helps us identify students who may benefit from additional academic support once they enter our program.

We do not use the GRE score to disqualify applicants from admission, which is why we do not set a minimum score; however, we do encourage you to prepare thoroughly and retake the exam if needed to achieve your best score, since a stronger score helps us better identify the kind of academic support that may benefit you. The GRE is never used on its own to make an admissions decision; it is considered alongside your academic record, experiences, letters of recommendation, and other application materials as part of our comprehensive, holistic review process. No single component of your application determines an admissions decision.

Observation Hours

Does the program require observation or healthcare experience in specific PT settings?

Yes, this observation hours are an admissions requirement. Applicants must complete and log a minimum of 40 hours of observation across two different physical therapy settings. How you divide your hours between those two settings is entirely up to you, since we understand it can sometimes be difficult to obtain a large number of hours in certain environments, such as inpatient or acute care settings. Hours worked as a PT Tech or Hospital Aide count toward this requirement. Please check our admissions requirements page online for full details.

How do I document and report my observation hours?

We recommend keeping a personal log of your observation hours that includes the name of the physical therapist you shadowed, the facility, the dates and hours completed, and contact information for

someone who can verify your hours later. When you apply through PTCAS, the centralized application service used by our program and most others, you'll be asked to provide contact information for individuals who can verify your hours. PTCAS will then reach out to those individuals directly for verification, using the details from your personal log.

Letters of Recommendation

How many letters of recommendation do I need, and who should they be from?

You need two letters of recommendation: one from a licensed Physical Therapist, and one from someone other than a PT (for example, an instructor, employer, or another professional reference).

These letters must be completed through PTCAS. Please make sure your references complete the evaluation/scoring section of the recommendation form on PTCAS, rather than submitting a narrative letter.

The Casper Exam

What is Casper?

Casper is an online, open-response situational judgment test (SJT). It asks what you would do in a challenging situation, and more importantly, why. This helps us understand the behavioral tendencies of applicants pursuing people-centered professions like physical therapy.

Why does the DPT program require Casper?

At Tennessee State University, we are committed to a holistic admissions process that considers applicants beyond traditional academic measures such as GPA and prerequisite coursework. While academic performance provides valuable information about an applicant's cognitive abilities, it does not fully capture the personal and professional attributes essential for success in a DPT program and in clinical practice. Casper gives applicants an additional opportunity to demonstrate qualities such as professionalism, ethical decision-making, communication, empathy, and sound judgment when faced with challenging situations.

Is Casper mandatory, and how much does it count toward my application?

Yes, Casper is mandatory and is completed pre-interview. Rather than replacing academic metrics or carrying a fixed weight or percentage, Casper is considered alongside your academic record, experiences, letters of recommendation, and other application materials as part of our comprehensive, holistic review process. No single component of your application determines an admissions decision.

How do I take the Casper exam?

The Casper assessment must be completed on a computer equipped with a working webcam, microphone, and a reliable high-speed internet connection. Your webcam and microphone are required for identity verification, remote proctoring, and the video response portion of the assessment. Before your test, make sure your computer meets the technical requirements and that you have access to a quiet environment with a stable connection. For complete technical specifications, system requirements, testing policies, and troubleshooting information, please visit the [Acuity Insights website](#).

Interview Process

Do you conduct interviews?

Yes. Once the application window has closed and after all verified PTCAS applications have been reviewed, the Admissions Committee identifies applicants who will proceed to the next step in our application process and be invited to participate in an in-person interview on campus. To encourage our candidates to ensure that we are the school for them, we require that all interviews be conducted on campus and do not offer virtual (“Zoom”) interviews at this time.

Interview dates will be announced at that time and are typically held on two designated weekdays during the fall, depending on the number of qualified applicants. Each interview session will take place during either the morning or afternoon on that selected day (half-day commitment).

The interview day will also include a tour of our facilities and campus led by current DPT students. This provides applicants an opportunity to learn more about the program, ask questions, and determine whether our program is the right fit for their professional journey.

What is the interview format?

Applicants participate in a series of one-on-one interviews with a variety of individuals who may include faculty members, alumni, current students, and practicing clinicians. These conversations allow us to learn more about each applicant's personal qualities, professional experiences, communication skills, and readiness for graduate study in physical therapy. We also evaluate how an applicant's values and goals align with our program's mission and commitment to developing compassionate, competent, and service-oriented physical therapists.

Interview assignments are made randomly, so we are unable to provide applicants with the names or roles of their interviewers in advance.

In addition to the interviews, applicants will complete a brief onsite essay. The essay may be completed either by hand or through a secure web-based platform. Applicants are not required to bring a laptop or other electronic device.

When are admissions decisions made?

Following each interview session, the Admissions Committee conducts one more comprehensive review of the applicant's complete file, which will now include interview and written essay performance. Applicants may receive one of the following decisions:

- Offer of admission (“Seat offer”)
- Placement on the waitlist
- Admission decision deferred/denied until later in the admissions cycle

Admission offers are extended on a rolling basis rather than on a single notification date. As a result, some applicants may receive an admission offer before all interview dates have been completed.

Applicants who are not selected for admission will be notified after the interview process has concluded.

Applicants who are invited to interview but do not attend or make alternative arrangements will not be considered for admission.

What if I need accessibility accommodations or cannot attend my scheduled interview?

Applicants who require accessibility accommodations for the interview should contact the Admissions Chair as soon as possible after receiving their interview invitation. We are committed to providing reasonable accommodations to ensure an equitable interview experience.

Because interview dates are limited, we cannot guarantee accommodations for scheduling conflicts. We encourage applicants to communicate with the Admissions Chair promptly if a conflict arises.

An interview is required for admission to the program. However, applicants experiencing significant geographic, travel, or other extenuating circumstances are encouraged to contact the Admissions Chair to discuss their situation. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and every effort will be made to determine an appropriate solution when possible.

Tuition & Cost

What is the cost of tuition?

As of our most recently published fact sheet, annual tuition is \$47,739 for in-state students and \$101,505 for out-of-state students. The total cost of the program is \$53,723 for in-state students and \$107,837 for out-of-state students. Because these figures are updated annually, please visit our [cost of attendance fact sheet](#) for the most current numbers.

Campus Visits & Open Houses

Are there opportunities to connect with current students and faculty, or attend an informational session?

Yes, and we encourage you to take advantage of them. Once our application cycle opens, we will begin announcing both virtual and in-person open house opportunities for prospective students, held in both the fall and spring semesters. These events are a great chance to learn more about the program, meet our faculty, and chat with current students who can answer your questions firsthand. Keep an eye on our website and social media accounts for these announcements.

If your travel schedule does not allow for or align with the campus visits we have planned, we have been able to accommodate one-on-one visits to our campus on a case-by-case basis as needed, to ensure everyone has the opportunity to see what our program has to offer. These individual visits can include a one-on-one meeting, the opportunity to sit in on a DPT class, and a tour of our campus and facilities.

Program Highlights

What are the program's strongest focuses or differentiators compared to other DPT programs?

We're really proud of what we offer. We have the lowest tuition cost of any DPT graduate program in the state of Tennessee. Our NPTE first-time pass rate was 100% this past year, and our five-year all-time pass rate is also 100%. We have an extensive network of clinical education placement sites, supported by a strong alumni community with connections throughout Tennessee and across the country. Our College of Health Science building which houses our main classroom was built in 2020 and is equipped

with state-of-the-art technology and lab spaces, and our faculty bring a wonderful mix of diverse clinical backgrounds and deep expertise across many areas of practice. There's a lot more to share. We encourage all applicants to attend one of our open houses or schedule a visit to learn more about the program.

Preparing for the Program

Once admitted, what advice would you give prospective students preparing for the rigor of the program?

Prepare yourself for lifelong learning. Challenge yourself to try new learning strategies early on, especially if you're met with any adversity along the way. Some habits that worked well in undergrad may not carry over into graduate school, and that's completely normal. We encourage students to lean on their classmates and stay open to adapting, since that flexibility and teamwork makes a huge difference. Exposure to medical terminology goes a long way in the success in your first semester Gross Anatomy course. Brush up and review prior to your first day of orientation to improve your readiness for the academic rigor required of a professional student.

Still Have Questions?

Thank you for your interest in the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Tennessee State University! We hope this FAQ has answered the majority of your questions and given you a clearer picture of what to expect throughout the admissions process.

If you still have questions after reviewing this page, please visit our Contact page and reach out directly to our Admissions Chair. We look forward to reviewing your application and being a part of your academic and professional journey!