

## Becoming a Competitive Applicant to Physical Therapy (PT) School

Applicants to physical therapy (PT) programs must complete a minimum of 90 credit hours (3 years) of college coursework, along with the pre-PT pre-requisites. Most pre-PT students complete a Bachelor's degree prior to entering a physical therapy program. Competitive applicants for admission have a solid academic record, a well-rounded profile of co-curricular experiences, strong scores on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), supportive letters of recommendation, and can clearly articulate their reasons for choosing physical therapy.



## SELECTING A MAJOR

Applicants with a well-rounded education, a variety of interests and personal experiences are ideal candidates and are encouraged to choose a major where they can demonstrate strong academic performance while focusing on developing a strong background in the sciences. PT schools look for students who demonstrate a strong ability to handle a rigorous course load.

## GPA

GPA's calculated on PT school applications normally include coursework done at all colleges attended. If a course is repeated, both grades will be included in the GPA's calculated by the PT schools. **Aim for GPA's of 3.3 or higher.**

## GRADES

C is an honorable grade, though most if not all grades should be higher! Multiple grades below B, especially within the two academic years leading up to PT school application, could interfere with admission to PT schools. Faced with a likely grade below C, some students should withdraw (W) and later try for a higher grade; consult with your advisors as you decide. More than two W's, however, could indicate a lack of judgment or an inability to handle challenges later in PT school.

## PRE-REQUISITE AND RECOMMENDED COURSES

Pre-PT students should complete certain coursework to be prepared for the rigor of a physical therapy program. In addition, students should research schools carefully to be aware of all prerequisite courses and other admissions policies, as prerequisites vary among PT programs. Students are encouraged to meet with a Pre-Health Advisor to develop their timeline for application to PT school.

## PRE-REQUISITES

Traditionally, physical therapy programs have selected candidates for admission who possessed:

- Two semesters of General Biology with lab – BIO 201/205; BIO 202/206
- Two semesters General Chemistry with lab – CHM 203/204; CHM 205/206; CHM 285/286 also meets this requirement
- Two semesters of General Physics with lab – PHY 201/205; PHY 202/206
- One semester of Physiology\* – EXS 320 or BIO 449
- One semester of Anatomy\* – EXS 331 or PHA 310
- Statistics – various options; some majors include a statistics course
- Psychology – PSY 201; various options
- English – including composition

\* For Creighton's PT program, students are not required to take a lab with the Physiology or Anatomy course; however, a number of PT programs do require the completion of both Anatomy and Physiology courses with labs. In addition to the prerequisites listed above, Creighton's PT program requires that Creighton applicants have six hours of Theology courses.

Some schools may not regard credit earned through examinations (AP, CLEP, IB) as being equivalent to completing required courses, but they may accept higher-level college courses as substitutes. Research individual schools for their policies regarding AP/CLEP/IB credits for pre-requisite courses.

## PRE-HEALTH GUIDES AND RESOURCES

**EDGE PRE-HEALTH ADVISING:** Pre-Health Advisors in the EDGE are available to meet with students one-on-one about their pre-health goals and path.

**EDGE PRE-HEALTH SEMINARS:** The EDGE seminars assist students in exploring the physical therapy profession, gaining experience in healthcare, and preparing for the application process. Students should participate in PHLC 200 in their sophomore year, and then PPT 300 in either the junior or senior year (depending upon the student's application timeline).

**PRE-PT CLUB:** All pre-PT students should participate in the Pre-PT Club.

This student-run organization provides leadership opportunities to further explore and gain experience in the PT profession - <https://creighton.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/prept>

**CU SCHOOL OF PHARMACY AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS (SPAHP):** Make an appointment with SPAHP admissions office personnel in the spring of the junior year to personalize the application process.

**PRE-HEALTH LISTSERV:** Subscribe at: <http://lists.creighton.edu/mailman/listinfo>

**HELPFUL LINKS:**  
[creighton.edu/edge](http://creighton.edu/edge) - Creighton EDGE  
 Creighton School of Pharmacy and Health Professions:  
<https://spahp.creighton.edu/>  
 American Physical Therapy Association:  
[www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org)

**Course Scheduling Considerations:** Freshmen and sophomores usually take only two natural science or math subjects each semester.

**Chemistry:** General Chemistry I (CHM 203/204) and General Chemistry II (CHM 205/206) are typical choices for freshman fall and spring. Students must have a sufficient chemistry background (completion of high school chemistry) and sufficient math background (an ACT math score of at least 24 or an SAT math score of at least 580) to be eligible take General Chemistry in the freshman year. Students may instead take additional math and/or CHM 105 Introductory Chemistry in freshman year to be better prepared for General Chemistry.

**Biology:** General Biology I (BIO 201/205) and General Biology II (BIO 202/206) are typical choices for freshman fall and spring, respectively. Completion of either General Chemistry I (CHM 203) or Introductory Chemistry (CHM 105) is required in order to take General Biology II.

**Physics:** Students who have sufficient math and physics (a year of high school physics; math through pre-calculus) are eligible to take General Physics I (PHY 201/205) and General Physics II (PHY 202/206). Prospective math, physics, and chemistry majors may take alternate sections of General Physics and additional math. Students who did not have physics in high school should consult with a pre-health advisor or the Physics Department prior to enrolling in General Physics I.

**Math:** Pre-PT students will need pre-calculus algebra and trigonometry knowledge to prepare for Physics; if those courses were not completed in high school, MTH 139 Precalculus should be taken (Note: MTH 139 does NOT meet the Magis Core math requirement; that would then be met by taking MTH 231 or 245). Math, physics, and chemistry majors will need more than one semester of calculus and usually should not take MTH 231.

**Summer:** Science courses may be taken in the summer by pre-PT students, but only when there are good reasons for doing so (not just a vague desire to “catch up”) and not at community colleges. Speak with a pre-health advisor about timelines!

#### Sample First Semester Schedule:

Course sequencing may vary depending upon a student's readiness.

- General Biology I with lab (4 sem. hours)
- General Chemistry I with lab (4 sem. hours) or Introductory Chemistry (3 sem. hours)
- Magis Core Class (3 or 4 sem. hours)  
– ENG or Critical Issues + COM
- Magis Core Class (3 sem. hours) – PHL or THL
- Maybe another Magis Core Class (3 sem. hours)  
– PSY or SOC, foreign language
- RSP Class (.5 semester hours each freshman semester)

### Physical Therapy Application Process

#### NATIONAL ADMISSION TESTS:

All applicants must take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) a national, standardized computer-based test. The GRE is typically taken approximately 12-15 months before starting PT school. To do well on this exam, students need to allow for significant study and preparation before the exam.

#### LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

Students can submit up to four letters of recommendation with their PTCAS application. Many PT schools require at least one or two letters from professors. Some schools may require that one letter be from a practicing physical therapist. Students are encouraged to research letter requirements by school.

**INTERVIEWS:** Many PT schools will interview promising applicants. The Career Center offers interview preparation assistance, including mock interviews.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:** Some PT schools might offer special consideration to applicants from socioeconomic groups underrepresented in the profession.

## CO-CURRICULAR EXPECTATIONS

Good grades and strong GRE scores are not enough to get you into PT school. It is important that you are a well-rounded applicant that participates in meaningful activities on your college campus and your community. Physical therapy is a service-focused profession and admissions officers look for students who demonstrate their promise to serve the community throughout their lifetimes. Additionally, PT schools expect students will shadow professionals and also value skills gained from leadership, research, and building relationships that can demonstrate readiness for PT school.

#### VOLUNTEER AND SERVICE

Students must have service experiences in both healthcare and non-healthcare settings, and it is important to show sustained commitment over time. Check out the Schelgel Center for Service and Justice for opportunities - <http://blogs.creighton.edu/ccsj/>

#### HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCE

Students should seek opportunities for hands-on, direct patient care experience, whether volunteer, paid, or both. Some specific ways students gain this employment is through becoming a PT/OT tech or aide, Certified Nurse Aide (CNA), an EMT with Basic certification, a phlebotomist, an eeg/ekg tech, patient care tech, home health aide, or medication aide, among others.

#### RESEARCH

Experiences that are data-driven, collaborative, and investigative, with results communicated publicly – are very helpful. See the Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship for opportunities at <http://www.creighton.edu/curas/>.

#### LEADERSHIP

Leadership comes in many forms. Creighton has a number of resources to help you gain leadership experience through various organizations and student programming. Showing some leadership skills now demonstrates you can be a leader in your community later.

#### SHADOWING

Students must gain knowledge of the profession by shadowing current professionals in their field. It is highly recommended that students shadow physical therapists in a variety of settings. Sustained shadowing experience with one physical therapist is also helpful, as a number of PT schools require a letter of recommendation from a practicing physical therapist. In addition, PT programs often require that applicants have documentation of a minimum number of shadowing hours. Creighton's PT program requires that applicants have at least 60 hours of shadowing experience with a physical therapist.