

The American Council of Academic Physical Therapy (ACAPT)

A New Vision of Academic Leadership

THE ACAPT PURPOSE

The formation of the American Council of Academic Physical Therapy (ACAPT) followed a natural evolution within the academy to pursue its deep and abiding commitment to excellence and innovation in the profession. Key steps in the development of ACAPT are captured below as a foundation for emergence of a new and sustaining culture of leadership in academic physical therapy.

THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACAPT

Historically, two previous formal organizations served the needs of leaders in physical therapy education to communicate and collaborate. The Council of School Directors, a group organized outside the walls of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) initially served these needs. Then, the Education Section, one of the earliest sections of the APTA, was approved in 1945 as the seat of communication among all physical therapists interested in education within the profession. Special Interest Groups within the Education Section then evolved specifically to address the needs of educators serving physical therapist education as academic administrators, faculty, clinical educators and, after the emergence of the physical therapist assistant (PTA), those who were providing training to PTAs. As a forum for discussion of vexing administrative issues and a point of contact for sharing information critical to education leadership roles in physical therapy, the Academic Administrator's Special Interest Group (AASIG) served for many years to unite the academic community. Clearly, AASIG was the precursor to ACAPT.

Over time, participants in the Education Section's AASIG recognized the need to move beyond information sharing to formal advocacy, policy development and construction of more powerful partnerships with influential groups associated with the academic enterprise. This recognition led to discussion of changes in structure and culture that would serve those needs and manage the challenges of leadership in both long-standing and new institutions hosting physical therapy education. Although signs of interest in developing a structure outside the Education Section had been evident for several years, the catalyst for developing ACAPT came in 2007 at the Education Leadership Conference (ELC) with a passionate plea for action by several members of AASIG. As has occurred in other professions (e.g. medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and optometry) that host professional education at the doctoral level, members of AASIG embraced the need to provide stronger leadership in the academy and the potential for our collective influence to increase if supported by a different organization structure within APTA.

THE CALL TO ACTION FOR CHANGE

Upon this backdrop, members of AASIG immediately convened a task force to explore developing a new organization that would invigorate and transform academic leadership in physical therapy. The work of this group culminated in 2008 with a report recommending a Council of Physical Therapy Academic Programs that would:

- Be established within the APTA to foster excellence in academic physical therapy education;
- Represent all academic physical therapist education programs through a self-governing structure separate from the Education Section;
- Work vigorously and collaboratively with appropriate units of APTA to effect initiatives that support and extend the influence of academic physical therapy.

Further, the task force recommended that AASIG support forwarding a motion to the APTA Board of Directors formally requesting approval of the new Council of Physical Therapy Academic Programs. The Academic Council, as it was to be called, was intended to fulfill the following mission and accompanying goals:

Promote excellence in academic physical therapy through communication, cooperation and collaboration among accredited programs, provide a structure for exercise of autonomy, accountability, and leadership in policy-making and decision-making that fosters the academic enterprise by:

- Establishing optimal standards and metrics of quality for physical therapy education programs;
- Interacting with other higher education organizations to define standards for professional doctoral education;
- Establishing consortia to promote common goals of various program communities;
- Establishing a formal relationship between academic administrators, academic faculty and clinical educators (faculty, clinical instructors, CCCEs) to facilitate a cohesive approach to education across academic and clinical settings; and
- Providing consultation and direction to APTA, CAPTE, FSBPT, WCPT and other professional organizations, governmental agencies and legislative bodies.

The organization proposed for approval was to be built on three major structural principles.

- First, unlike membership in any other component of APTA, the Academic Council was to be comprised of *institutional members* from academic programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). Each institution was to select one voting representative who was a member of APTA, and agree to pay annual dues to support the Academic Council's governing process and strategic initiatives. Allowance for a "general membership", to include didactic and clinical faculty and students associated with accredited PT programs, and the development of consortia representing special interests were to be future considerations.
- Second, the Academic Council was to be *self-governing within APTA*, with officers and a deliberative body, bylaws and an independent budget. Although conceived to be independent of the Education Section and its AASIG, active collaboration and complementary action remained important. The Academic Council was conceived to take independent responsibility for setting policy and promoting positions of interest to its membership – positions that would not necessarily be consistent with those of the APTA or its components. However, the leadership of the Academic Council would pledge active communication with the Education Division of APTA as it works to support the education community and the profession.
- Third, the Academic Council was to maintain a sole focus on *physical therapist education*. The needs of PTA educators would continue to be served by the Education Section and APTA, with efforts to assure that common interests are addressed through the types of collaboration of benefit to the profession and consumers it serves.

In response to the task force recommendations, and after intense discussion and debate, 152 academic programs pledged their support "to develop a new organization of physical therapist academic programs, and... a constitution consistent with the proposed mission, goals and principles of organization." A Council Organizing Committee was then appointed with broad-based membership from research intensive universities, private and public institutions, and members of three special interest groups of the Education Section – AASIG, the Clinical Education SIG and the PTA SIG. A preliminary report of the work of the organizing committee was presented at the 2009 Combined Sections meeting, with a final report presented at the 2009 ELC.

ACAPT BECOMES A REALITY

On the basis of the Organizing Committee's work and continuing discussion among AASIG members and APTA leadership, a petition was presented to the APTA Board of Directors on October 3, 2009 to form a new Council to promote excellence in PT education and to be the voice of academic physical therapy inside and external to the association. This petition was considered in 2010 by the Academic Governance Workgroup as a part of APTA's overall analysis of potential governance changes throughout the association. As a result, two phases of change were approved by the APTA Board of Directors. In Phase 1, the organization would exist as council of the APTA Board of Directors because institutional membership was not consistent with existing APTA bylaws. In Phase 2 bylaw changes would be pursued to enable a component with institutional membership to be viable under the umbrella of the American Physical Therapy Association. The American Council of Academic Physical Therapy – ACAPT – was formally approved by the House of Delegates in 2013.

ACAPT'S NEXT STEPS

Since its approval, ACAPT has implemented its governance structure, developed communication mechanisms for the academic community (including a website featuring its unique brand), and crafted far-reaching strategic plans to

achieve its stated goals. The transition from a Board of Director's Council to a self-governing ACAPT has been nearly seamless, and leaders from the academic community have generously volunteered to serve the ACAPT Board of Directors and its task forces and panels. Consortia have begun to develop within ACAPT to assure inclusion of the multiple interests embedded in the academy. A major thrust to establish a Flexible Shared Vision for Clinical Education culminated in the Clinical Education Summit held in October 2014 to address the issues shared by all individuals involved in physical therapy education.

Consistent with ACAPT's collaborative philosophy, APTA, the Education Section and ACAPT are united in the intent(s) to:

- **Solidify the identity** of the profession and the uniqueness of each organizational component
- **Engage in innovation** to advance the missions of education, research and clinical care
- **Lead professional action** to ensure that physical therapy is a proactive element of health care within society
- **Advance leadership** of individuals and components to ensure the current and future strength of the profession in health care
- **Cultivate resources** to enable investment in current and future initiatives
- **Seek new knowledge** to continually challenge tradition and define best practices that support excellence
- **Share best practices** through multidimensional networking and communication patterns

Academic physical therapy will continue to have a powerful influence on teaching, learning, research and practice, through its unique structure, its influential leadership and its collaboration with the multiple institutions, associations and individuals that drive excellence in the academy.

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