



ELP Pre-Admission Observation Hours Task Force Report

Contents

Overview	2
Purpose	2
Objectives	2
Task Force Duties	3
Report Format	3
Task Force Structure and Members.....	3
Chair	3
ACAPT Liaison.....	3
Members	3
Survey Development and Dissemination.....	3
Survey Results	4
Task Force Recommendations	5
Appendix	5

ACAPT Pre-Admission Observation Hours Task Force Report

December 28, 2022

Overview

The National Consortium of Clinical Educators (NCCE) charged the Pre-Admission Observation Hours (ObHr) Task Force (TF) to investigate the current landscape surrounding pre-admission ObHr in Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) education. An objective of the pre-admission ObHr TF was to “develop recommendations for future practices regarding required and/or recommended pre-admission ObHr, including proposing possible alternative strategies to meet the needs of DPT Programs, Clinical Sites, Clinicians, and Students.”^a The final TF report (2020), endorsed by the NCCE and American Council of Academic Physical Therapy (ACAPT), included a proposal of six recommendations that be developed and supported by multiple physical therapy education stakeholders, including the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS), ACAPT, Academy of Education (AoE), and Education Leadership Partnership (ELP). The ELP Pre-Admission ObHr TF, with representation from APTA, ACAPT, AoE, and PTCAS convened to execute the recommendations. Four of the original six recommendations were created and adopted by ACAPT membership and/or ELP (January 2022). The ELP TF recommended that a new TF with representation from ACAPT, AoE, and APTA Staff (CAS) move forward on the creation of alternative observation hours pathways. This report details the work of the newest ACAPT Pre-Admission Observation Hours TF.

Purpose

The ACAPT Pre-admission ObHr TF was charged to create alternative observation hours pathways.

Objectives

1. Determine the need and feasibility of the development of alternative experiences outside of traditional ObHr, that academic programs may consider, that may demonstrate a prospective student has explored and understands the physical therapy profession.
2. Through the use of data from a national survey distributed to physical therapist (PT) and physical therapist assistant (PTA) program chairs:
 - a. Determine academic programs’ willingness to accept alternative experiences in lieu of ObHr.
 - b. Determine what type of alternative experiences may be considered in lieu of ObHr.
 - c. Investigate if acceptance of alternative experiences may change academic programs’ required or recommended hours.

An ACAPT Representative (JB), who was a member of the Pre-Admission ObHr TF, chaired the ACAPT Pre-Admission ObHr TF. Task Force member selection was strategic to include diversity of stakeholders.

^a Gleeson P, Bayliss J, Hoang H, Watkins M, Shack J, et al. December 2020. Pre-Admissions observation hours task force final report. Academic Council of American Physical Therapy National Consortium of Clinical Educators. Available at: [https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-\(ncce\)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0](https://acapt.org/docs/default-source/consortium-(ncce)/acapt-ncce-pre-admission-ob-hr-report-revised-3-recommendation-final-12-10-20.pdf?sfvrsn=5f5982d8_0).

- APTA Academy of Education Representative
- Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) Academic Program representative
- Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS) representative
- ACAPT NCCE Pre-Admission ObHr TF Members

Task Force Duties

The TF members recommended surveying PT and PTA academic programs about their willingness to accept alternative experiences in lieu of ObHr; about the type of alternative experiences that programs may consider in lieu of ObHr; and if acceptance of alternative experiences may change academic programs' required or recommended hours prior to developing alternative experience resources.

Report Format

- Task Force Structure and Members
- Survey Development and Dissemination
- Summary of Survey Responses
- Recommendations
- Appendices

Task Force Structure and Members

Chair

- Jamie Bayliss, PT, MPT, DHSc

ACAPT Liaison

- Sandy Brooks, ACAPT Executive Director

Members

- Ryan Bannister, BA
- Yvonne Colgrove, PT, PhD
- Thuha (Ha) Hoang, PT, PhD, MHS
- Christen Louderman, PT
- Colette Pientok, PT, DPT
- Matthew Schumacher, PT, DPT, OCS, FAAOMPT
- Laura Stephens, PT, DPT, NCS

Survey Development and Dissemination

All TF members participated in the email and survey creation. The survey email and online survey link (Appendix I) included two open ended questions and two closed questions. The TF sought feedback from the Data Advisory Committee prior to finalizing the online survey.

The email and survey link were disseminated by an ACAPT staff member using an ACAPT email address to all PT and PTA program directors. Program directors were asked to forward the email and survey link to the appropriate individual if they did not feel they could answer the questions regarding pre-admission ObHr. The survey remained open for two weeks.

Survey Results

Two hundred individuals (n = 200) responded to survey question #2. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated their program will accept alternative experiences in lieu of observation hours (virtual/web-based learning modules that will allow prospective students to understand the depth and breadth of the physical therapy profession, including settings, patient populations, as well as the role of various interprofessional team members) while 36% reported they would not accept alternative experiences.

A variety of alternative experiences that would be accepted in lieu of ObHr was noted in response to question #3 (Table 1). Videos, specifically those that may include “A Day in the Life” of PTs and PTAs and different settings, were the most supported alternative experiences.

Alternative Experiences	Percentage (%)
Videos of a “Day in the Life” of various physical therapists (PTs) and physical therapist assistants (PTAs) who work in various settings with different patient populations and a variety of healthcare providers.	18
Virtual observation hours video in different settings	15
Informational module or video about specialty settings	14
Interview with a PT/PTA	13
Panel Interview/Webinars with PTs and PTA for Q & A	11
Interprofessional Healthcare Team Video	10
Writing assignment about applicant's personal experiences	8
Interview with a current DPT/PTA student	6
Other	4
Book reading	2

Responses noted from ‘other’ responses include:

- Program does not require observation hours; not applicable.
- Any of these would be interpreted as a positive effort toward gaining information on the profession.
- Work experience in healthcare

Question #4, answered by an n of 113, inquired about whether or not acceptance of alternative experiences would potentially change a program’s number of required or recommended hours. Results are outlined in Table 2. The majority of respondents indicated that their academic program will allow the hours spent completing an alternative experience to count toward meeting the required/recommended number of hours.

Effect of Alternative Experiences	Percentage (%)
Yes, our program would likely eliminate required hours in favor of alternative experiences	11
Yes, our program would likely eliminate recommended hours in favor of alternative experiences	8

Yes, our program would likely reduce required or recommended hours in favor of alternative experiences	14
Yes, our program will allow the hours spent completing an alternative experience to count toward meeting the required/recommended number of hours	26
No, we would likely keep our programs required and recommended hours	12
Unsure	8
Other	12

Responses noted from 'other' responses include:

- Program has already eliminated the requirement of observation hours but strongly recommends learning more about the profession
- No observation hours required
- Observation hour requirements discontinued due to COVID-19
- Applicants are now required to write an essay about their experiences and how they understand the depth and breadth of physical therapy

Respondents were asked to share resources related to alternative experiences that are currently available. Some of the responses include:

- The use of the APTA's website to answer guiding questions
- ICE videos
- Video assignment watching videos about 'day in the life of'...a PT or PTA
- Simucase and YouTube videos
- Interviews of PTs/local clinicians
- Early program courses that detail the profession

Task Force Recommendations

Survey response rate (n = 203; ~32%) is relatively low compared to the number of accredited PT and PTA programs. With the relaxation of COVID-19 related restrictions in clinical settings and programmatic modifications, many of which became permanent changes, to observation hours, applicants may not be experiencing the same challenges acquiring traditional observation hours as they were at the height of the pandemic when the initial task force study was conducted. As such, the development of alternative experiences may not seem as pressing or needed at this current time. Since pre-admission ObHr have not been investigated since the onset of the pandemic, it is unknown if programs have made additional changes to their pre-observation hours requirements in response to the taskforce findings. Therefore, programs may be more amiable to adopting alternative experiences in the near future once processes related to the admissions process become more stable following the pandemic.

Appendix

Email to PT and PTA Program Chairs

You are invited to participate in a brief survey as part of an investigation of observation hours for the application into Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) and Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA) programs. Historically, programs have utilized observation hours to ensure students have knowledge of the

profession and the demands of this field. We are examining any changes that PT and PTA programs may have made over the past few years, including any changes due to COVID, and what potential changes programs may permanently adopt.

Clinical education has been a challenge for many programs pre-Covid and now ensuring adequate depth and breadth of education for all students has become more challenging, in part due to the fatigue of clinical educators and lack of open facilities to students.

The ACAPT Pre-Admissions Observation Hours Task Force is exploring ways to decrease the burden on our partner clinical sites as well as facilitating equity among student applicants.

As needed, information from this survey will be used to assist with development of learning modules for prospective applicants to DPT and PTA programs:

- The learning modules are intended to familiarize applicants with the profession of physical therapy, differences between DPTs and PTAs, and the practice of PT in different settings.
- Development of such learning modules may provide an alternative to some of the observation hours requirements by physical therapy education programs.
- The survey will also track an academic programs' willingness to accept alternative experiences in lieu of observation hours and what those alternative experiences may be.

Program directors are receiving this survey, but if there is someone else from your program/admissions committee who can better answer these questions, please forward this email and [\\${!://SurveyLink?d=survey link}](#). This survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey by Friday, October 21. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Jamie Bayliss at acapt@acapt.org.

All data will remain anonymous and only identifiable to ACAPT staff.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Follow this link to the Survey:

[\\${!://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${!://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${!://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)