Pre-Physical Therapy

What is Pre-Physical Therapy?

Pre-Physical Therapy (Pre-PT) is a pre-professional program at Cornell College for students interested in pursuing a career as a physical therapist. The program is designed to help students identify both prerequisites for admission and meaningful co-curricular experiences in and out of the medical field. The program is coordinated by Dimensions: The Center for the Science and Culture of Healthcare. Pre-PT students are expected to meet regularly with the Associate Director of Dimensions and are strongly encouraged to attend pre-health events sponsored by Dimensions on and off campus.

Professional Resources

The following resources offer extensive, reliable information on preparing for the healthcare field, in addition to those found throughout the Dimensions Guide to Pre-Physical Therapy:

- Dimensions: The Center for the Science and Culture of Healthcare
- ExploreHealthCareers.org
- Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS)

Pre-Physical Therapy Guide Outline

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**What is a Physical Therapist?**

Physical therapists (PTs) teach patients various therapeutic exercises and activities that strengthen muscles, improve mobility, and relieve pain. PTs are often an important part of rehabilitation and treatment of patients with chronic conditions or injuries. PTs assist patients in a wide range of activities, from teaching patients how to walk again after head-injuries to helping athletes improve their physical performance on the playing field. Their patients include accident victims and clients with such conditions as amputations, stroke, vertigo, low back pain, sports injuries, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.

PTs work in private offices, nursing homes, clinics, adult daycare programs, rehabilitation centers, home health agencies, school districts, and hospitals (Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2015). PTs also work with athletes in various settings.

Click [here](#) to watch a video on physical therapy from the American Physical Therapy Association. PTs must complete a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program and pass a board exam in order to practice as a licensed Physical Therapist. Medical careers related to physical therapy include Physical Therapy Assistants (PTAs).

**American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)**

**Cornell College Health Professions Committee (HPC)**

The HPC assists current students and alumni applying to professional programs in healthcare. The HPC process results in a Committee Letter of Recommendation sent to each school the student applies to, along with all other letters of recommendation. The Committee Letter of Recommendation is signed by the 4 members of the HPC:

- Barbara Christie Pope, PhD
- Craig Tepper, PhD
- Associate Director of Dimensions
- 1 Cornell College faculty or staff member of the student’s choosing

The HPC Committee Guide is updated annually and should be reviewed by applicants before applying for the HPC. Students can find the most up-to-date version of the HPC Committee Guide on the Dimensions HPC website. Dimensions hosts workshops every year during 3rd or 4th block on the HPC and healthcare program application processes.

Applications are due to the HPC the summer before the intended application cycle begins. (For example, students hoping to start a DPT program in fall 2017 will submit all application materials to the HPC in summer 2016.) Visit the Dimensions website to learn more about the HPC application process.

**Centralized Application for Physical Therapy**

Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS)

**Accredited DPT Programs**

Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE)  
Accredited Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) Programs in the United States
Physical Therapy Prerequisites

A specific major is not required for admission into a DPT program. Students are advised to major in a discipline they are both most interested and able to excel in.

The following courses are required for admission to most DPT programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prerequisite (PTCAS 2015)</th>
<th>Prerequisites for the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine (2015 Cycle)</th>
<th>Course Equivalent at Cornell College</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 English courses</td>
<td>General Education requirements</td>
<td>ENG 111 (1st Year Writing Course) &amp; 1 additional writing course within the English department</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Mathematics course</td>
<td>A college-level mathematics course, at the level of trigonometry or higher, equivalent to 3 semester hours</td>
<td>Various</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Statistics course</td>
<td>A Statistical Methods course equivalent to 3 semester hours</td>
<td>STA 201 (Statistical Methods I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 General Biology courses with lab</td>
<td>12 semester hours in Biological Sciences (Introductory courses and additional courses for which introductory course is prerequisite)</td>
<td>BIO 141 (Foundations: Cellular Biology) &amp; BIO 142 (Foundations: Organismal Biology) &amp; 1 additional biology course (BIO 205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 General Chemistry courses with lab</td>
<td>8 semester hours of introductory coursework</td>
<td>CHE 121 (Chemical Principles I) &amp; CHE 122 (Chemical Principles II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Physics courses with lab</td>
<td>8 semester hours of introductory coursework</td>
<td>PHY 141 (Introductory Physics I) &amp; PHY 142 (Introductory Physics II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Behavioral/Social Science courses</td>
<td>6 semester hours of Psychology coursework</td>
<td>Recommended: PSY 161 (Fundamentals of Psychological Science) &amp; PSY 282 (Abnormal Psychology)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Humanities course</td>
<td>General Education requirements</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Anatomy &amp; Physiology courses</td>
<td>A systemic Human Physiology course equivalent to 3 semester hours</td>
<td>BIO 329 (Human Anatomy &amp; Physiology I) &amp; BIO 330 (Human Anatomy &amp; Physiology II)</td>
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The following courses at Cornell College are prerequisites for some of the aforementioned PTCAS prerequisites and/or are recommended for students pursuing DPT programs:
CHE 225 (Organic Chemistry I Lecture)
KIN 309 (Anatomy of Human Movement)
KIN 310 (Nutrition for Health and Performance)
KIN 207 (Systems Physiology)

Note: Each DPT program has a specific list of prerequisites you must complete to be considered for admission. Most DPT programs require additional courses than those specified in the table above. Visit both the PTCAS Program Prerequisites website and DPT program websites regularly to explore program-specific prerequisites to ensure you’ve satisfied courses needed before applying. Be sure your Faculty Advisor is aware that you are Pre-PT. It is strongly recommended that you meet with your Faculty Advisor and Dimensions staff regularly to ensure you are meeting the requirements for both your major and DPT programs in the proper sequence.

AP Credit
Many DPT programs have different rules when it comes to accepting AP credit as fulfillment of a prerequisite. If you enter Cornell College with AP credit, closely check the requirements of the DPT programs of which you intend to apply.
**Community College Credit**
Most DPT programs prefer that applicants take all prerequisites at a 4-year institution. Students interested in earning credit at a community college should meet with their Faculty Advisor and the Associate Director of Dimensions before registration.

**What makes a competitive applicant for DPT programs?**

DPT programs are incredibly competitive, with many more qualified applicants applying each year than there are spots available. DPT programs today are looking for well-balanced applicants. Most DPT programs offer a holistic review of DPT program applications meeting the minimum GPA and Graduate Record Exam (GRE) score. Holistic review is an individualized way of assessing an applicant’s capabilities by which balanced consideration is given to experiences, attributes, and academic metrics and, when considered in combination, how the individual might contribute value as a DPT student and physical therapist.

Becoming a competitive applicant for DPT programs is a marathon, not a sprint. Students should not rush into a DPT application cycle. The “right” time to apply for a DPT program is unique for each applicant and representative of their individual aptitude for the sciences, experiences, and level of personal readiness to commit to the health profession.

Competitive DPT program applicants:

- Earn high grades in prerequisites at a 4-year institution
- Demonstrate (from experience) they are aware of the physical therapist’s role in today’s medical climate in relation to other healthcare providers
- Apply to DPT programs only when they feel they are ready to make a lifelong commitment to medicine and have the strongest application possible
- Research the schools they apply to assess “fit” and review prerequisites before applying
- Reflect on and make connections between experiences leading up to applying for a DPT program
  - Can discuss what they learned from their experiences rather than what they contributed
  - Demonstrate how they’ve applied what they learned in earlier experiences to experiences that followed
  - Are able to easily demonstrate and explain why experiences were personally meaningful
  - Demonstrate they understand the impact and purpose of their responsibilities in each experience
- Have high science and cumulative GPAs
- Earn a competitive GRE score (scores vary by program)
- Balance diverse PT experiences and other activities they are passionate about
- Can speak from experience when asked the question, “What makes a good physical therapist?”
- Can answer the question “Why do you want to be a physical therapist?” clearly and easily, demonstrating self-reflection and realistic expectations of the physical therapist role
- Have a parallel plan in mind: They know what they will do to demonstrate interest in and a commitment to medicine if they are not accepted into a DPT program in their first application cycle.

Review [APTA’s Physical Therapist (PT) Admissions Process](#) to learn more about the DPT admission process.
**Cornell College Pre-Physical Therapy Sample 4-Year Timeline***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Cornell College Course Satisfying Prerequisite</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Year</strong></td>
<td>FYS ENG 111 1 additional English writing course</td>
<td>Your top priorities are becoming acquainted with your new surroundings, living arrangements, and course requirements. Students are strongly encouraged to get involved in co-curricular activities they are interested in or passionate about. (Activities do not all need to be medical-related.) New students should meet with the Associate Director of Dimensions at least once during their first year on campus.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BIO 141 BIO 142 CHE 121 CHE 122</td>
<td>• Many students will begin exploring opportunities to shadow healthcare professionals, volunteer in the community, and take part in student organizations. Hours spent in co-curricular activities should be tracked for PTCAS.</td>
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<td>• Students are encouraged to start thinking about summer as early as October**.</td>
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<td>• Students should review professional resources from this document and the Dimensions website to familiarize themselves with physical therapy and the medical field.</td>
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<td>• Attend relevant Dimensions Pre-Health Workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Second Year</strong></td>
<td>PSY 161 STA 201 CHE 225 BIO 205</td>
<td>• Seek opportunities to work closely with faculty members on research and other projects outside of class. Narrow down co-curricular involvement to experiences that are most meaningful to you and that you are most passionate about (even if it’s not healthcare related.) Move up to leadership positions or take on more responsibility in co-curricular activities.</td>
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<td>• Start looking at DPT programs more closely to identify unique requirements of schools you are interested in. Read in detail about the physical therapy school application cycles, the GRE, and the Cornell College Health Professions Committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Attend relevant Dimensions Pre-Health Workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Third Year</strong></td>
<td>PHY 141 PHY 142 PSY 282 1 math course (Trigonometry or higher) BIO 329</td>
<td>• Continue to work up to leadership positions or take on more responsibilities in co-curricular activities. Continue to shadow in the medical field and volunteer in the community.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Be sure you’ve completed at least the minimum amount of shadowing hours required by DPT programs you plan to apply to.</td>
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<td>• Register for the GRE and prepare by taking several full-length practice exams. (Dimensions can help you identify GRE prep resources.) Students should sit for the GRE in April, May or June of their third year on campus if they plan to apply to start DPT program immediately following graduation.</td>
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<td>• Prepare for Health Professions Committee if you intend to enter a DPT program immediately following graduation. Application deadlines should be verified with the Associate Director of Dimensions before the end of your junior year. (Example: Health Profession Committee applications are due summer 2016 if you hope to start medical school fall 2017.)</td>
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<td>• Attend relevant Dimensions Pre-Health Workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Year</strong></td>
<td>BIO 330</td>
<td>• Complete secondary applications and on-campus interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recommended: KIN 309 KIN 310 KIN 207</td>
<td>• Attend relevant Dimensions Pre-Health Workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete graduation major/minor requirements.</td>
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</table>

*You should always begin with the course most aligned with your current ability. It is better to start a few courses back and earn an “A” than to jump right into the prerequisite course and earn a “B” or “C”. This sample timeline includes many required, recommended, and prerequisite courses for DPT programs. Always consult specific DPT program prerequisites and with your Faculty Advisor before making course selections.*
Pre-Physical Therapy students hoping to enter a DPT program immediately after graduation are strongly encouraged to use their summers. This includes conducting research, volunteering in the community, shadowing or interning in the medical field, and/or working in the healthcare field.