

## Bachelor Degree in Exercise Science Preparing for Physical Therapy

### ***Why is Exercise Science a good major for me?***

There are several exceptional bachelor degree programs at SIUE. However, the bachelor of science degree in Exercise Science is appealing to many health science students as it combines courses in human anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and physics along with applied science courses such as functional anatomy, biomechanics, and exercise physiology. The unique combination of courses is an excellent preparation for entering a wide range of health based careers, especially physical therapy.

### ***Will I be able to practice physical therapy after I complete my Bachelor of Science?***

No, regardless of your undergraduate major you must attain a graduate degree at an accredited physical therapy (PT) program. There are over 200 physical therapist education programs, nearly all of which award doctoral degrees. Typically, students must spend three years in a doctor of physical therapy degree program beyond their bachelor's degree.

### ***What classes should I take to prepare for application to graduate PT programs?***

The Exercise Science program has established a pre-physical therapy elective group of courses that is commonly required for PT school admission. However, each PT program maintains its own course pre-requisites and requirements. As such, it is important that you begin to research programs in which you may be interested in application very early in your time at SIUE to ensure that you can fit these courses into your curriculum plan. Generally, biology, chemistry, human anatomy and physiology, physics, statistics, math, and social science courses are required for application by the majority of programs. The Exercise Science faculty advisors are able to help you plan your curriculum to meet your desired graduation goal.

| Subject                | Number of semesters required           | Percent of PT programs requiring |
|------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Anatomy and Physiology | 1                                      | 99                               |
| Biological Sciences    | 1 - often requires a corresponding lab | 35                               |
|                        | 2 in sequence                          | 29                               |
|                        | 2 not necessarily in sequence          | 11                               |
|                        | More than 2                            | 8                                |
| Chemistry              | 2 in sequence                          | 94                               |
|                        | 1                                      | 4                                |
| Physics                | 2 in sequence                          | 96                               |
|                        | 1                                      | 3                                |
| Statistics             | 1                                      | 97                               |

Data for 2011-2012 Admissions Cycle obtained from [http://www.ptcas.org/PTCAS\\_Courses\\_2011\\_12\\_FINAL\\_forApplicants.pdf](http://www.ptcas.org/PTCAS_Courses_2011_12_FINAL_forApplicants.pdf)

### ***What kinds of courses will I be taking in a physical therapy graduate program?***

Students will take basic science courses, behavioral science courses, as well as clinical and applied sciences courses. Students will engage in classroom, laboratory and clinical experiences in their graduate physical therapy programs.

### ***How do I get into a graduate physical therapy program?***

Competition for seats in these programs is very high. There is no one formula that will fit the admissions criteria for all programs; this is why it is essential to research each program in which you may be interested in applying. Great resources for research include the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE), American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS), and individual school websites.

### ***What should I do to become a competitive applicant for graduate physical therapy programs?***

Do well in your courses! Not only will this prepare you for the rigors of physical therapy school, but it will only serve to increase your gpa (one predictive indicator of success in PT school). It is of particular importance that you do well in your science coursework, and strive for As in these courses. Although many schools require a gpa of around 3.0 for application purposes, most average accepted students' gpas are in the 3.6 to 3.7 range. All courses that you repeat are calculated into your PTCAS gpa, so even though your grade is replaced on your SIUE transcript, the PT programs will complete a calculation to include all attempts in coursework.

Also, be certain that you take all of the coursework that is recommended and required by the schools to which you may wish to apply. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is also required by many graduate PT programs; you will need to prepare and study to do your best on the GRE. But, remember that a high GRE score does not substitute for poor academic performance and low grades.

Several PT programs require applicants to have observational or internship hours in a wide range of PT settings (outpatient, inpatient etc). It is important you are aware of a programs application requirements and prepare accordingly. Luckily, as an Exercise Science student you are required to complete a 200 hour internship in order to graduate. Several Exercise Science students have had exceptional experiences at a wide range of PT clinics in the Edwardsville and St. Louis metro area. The Exercise Science internship coordinator can help you find a PT clinic to request and intern position at.

Lastly, many PT programs ask applicants to write an essay outlining why they have chosen PT as a career. The essay is very important and will require a lot of thought and preparation to stand out from other applicants. We suggest you give yourself several months to write an intelligent and clear statement on you career decisions.

### ***What other factors should I consider?***

Be sure that the programs to which you wish to apply accept “transfer” students. Even though you will have your bachelor’s degree, some PT programs are “freshman admit only” and only accept students who begin and attain their bachelor degrees from that same institution.

Plan and prepare early. Many PT programs have application deadlines that are nearly one year prior to the start of the program. All materials, including references, observation hours, GRE scores, coursework, and personal statements are often required early in the fall prior to the year that you will begin the program. Many schools offer Early Decision Applications, which are due mid-August prior to the year of admission. Plan to be certain that you will fit in any pre-requisite courses into your overall undergraduate curriculum plan. About three-quarters of the PT programs utilize the PTCAS as a centralized application service; it is essential that you review information on the PTCAS website to be sure that you are informed of the procedure for submitting your application.

### ***Is physical therapy right for me?***

First, ask yourself why you are interested in pursuing a doctor of physical therapy degree. Give this much consideration and reflection. Second, conduct some informational interviews with physical therapists and physical therapy students – have questions in mind that will help you learn about the profession. Finally, clinical observation/shadowing with a physical therapist is essential. As an Exercise Science student you are required to complete a 200 hour internship, and we suggest you seek out a physical therapy clinic. An internship in a PT clinic will help you ascertain whether the environment, conditions and work feels like it will be a good fit for you.

Sources:

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos080.htm>

<http://www.ptcas.org/index.html>

[http://www.ptcas.org/PTCAS\\_Courses\\_2011\\_12\\_FINAL\\_forApplicants.pdf](http://www.ptcas.org/PTCAS_Courses_2011_12_FINAL_forApplicants.pdf)

