LAKE MICHIGAN COLLEGE











PTA *Advising Guide*

A Guide for Students Preparing to Apply to the Physical Therapist Assistant Program

Questions?

(269) 927-8768

PTA Program Website

healthsciences@lakemichigancollege.edu

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Message from the Program Director

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) Program at Lake Michigan College. If you're considering a future in physical therapy, it likely means you want to make a real difference by helping people move better, feel better, and live fuller lives. It's a hands-on, rewarding profession that combines clinical skill with human connection.

Small class sizes and dedicated faculty mentorship create a supportive and collaborative learning environment where students can thrive. You will gain hands-on training in our state-of-the-art lab and build real-world experience through clinical education, preparing you to step confidently into today's healthcare settings.

This Advising Guide outlines the PTA profession, admission requirements, application steps, and other important details to help you prepare. I encourage you to take the next step by attending a PTA Program Information Session, reaching out with questions, or continuing to learn about the field. My door is always open if you would like to talk about how we can support you as you move forward.

Sincerely,

Sue Tomica

Sue Tomica, PT, DPT
Program Director, PTA Program

Accreditation

Program Accreditation

Graduation from a physical therapist assistant education program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE), 3030 Potomac Ave, Suite 100, Alexandria, VA 22305-3085, (703) 706-3245, accreditation@apta.org, is necessary for eligibility to sit for the licensure examination, which is required in all states. Candidacy is considered to be an accredited status, as such the credits and degree earned from a program with Candidacy status are considered, by CAPTE, to be from an accredited program. Therefore, students in the charter (first) class should be eligible to take the licensure exam even if CAPTE withholds accreditation at the end of the candidacy period. That said, it is up to each state licensing agency, not CAPTE, to determine who is eligible for licensure. Information on licensing requirements should be directed to the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT; www.fsbpt.org) or specific state boards. A list of state boards and contact information is available on FSBPT's website.

Lake Michigan College (LMC) is seeking accreditation of a new physical therapist assistant education program from CAPTE. On May 1, 2026, the program submitted an Application for Candidacy, which is the formal application required in the pre-accreditation stage. Submission of this document does not assure that the program will be granted Candidate for Accreditation status. Achievement of Candidate for Accreditation status is required prior to implementation of the professional phase of the program; therefore, no students may be enrolled in professional courses until Candidate for Accreditation status has been achieved. Further, though achievement of Candidate for Accreditation status signifies satisfactory progress toward accreditation, it does not assure that the program will be granted accreditation. CAPTE's initial accreditation decision is expected in December 2028, concurrent with the graduation of the inaugural cohort. Graduates of the inaugural cohort will be eligible to sit for the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE) beginning in January 2029. If the program does not achieve initial accreditation following Candidacy status, LMC will implement a teach-out plan and provide academic advising to support enrolled students in pursuing alternative educational pathways. Preliminary agreements with regional accredited PTA programs will facilitate transfer opportunities, pending students' completion of all admission requirements and application processes.

College Accreditation

Lake Michigan College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), a regional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The HLC has also approved LMC to offer the Physical Therapist Assistant Program. For details, visit LMC's Accreditation webpage.

The Higher Learning Commission
230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500
Chicago, Illinois 60604-1411
(800) 621-7440

Contact Information

PTA Program

South Haven Campus, Room 220
125 Veterans Boulevard
South Haven, Michigan 49090
(269) 637-7500

Hours of Operation:
Monday - Thursday: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Friday: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Hours may vary during summer semester and holidays

Health Sciences Office

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What is a Physical Therapist Assistant?

A physical therapist assistant (PTA) is a licensed healthcare professional who provides direct patient care, helping people improve mobility, reduce pain, and restore function following injury, illness, or surgery. PTAs work collaboratively with physical therapists to implement comprehensive treatment plans, performing hands-on interventions such as:

- Therapeutic exercise
- Gait and mobility training
- Balance activities
- Manual therapy techniques
- Pain management techniques
- Physical agents and modalities (heat, cold, ultrasound)
- Patient education

PTAs work in diverse healthcare settings, including hospitals, outpatient clinics, rehabilitation facilities, skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, sports medicine clinics, and schools. This variety allows PTAs to specialize in areas aligned with their interests and skills, whether working with athletes, children, the elderly, or individuals recovering from specific conditions or injuries. PTAs often explore different settings throughout their careers, gaining broad experience in physical therapy.

The **career outlook** for PTAs is strong, particularly in Southwest Michigan where growing healthcare needs drive demand for rehabilitation services. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of PTAs is projected to grow 22% from 2024 to 2034, much faster than the average for all occupations. The mean annual wage for physical therapist assistants was $65,860 in May 2023, with the top 10% of earners making $88,830.

Considering a Career as a PTA

If you're interested in a healthcare career that combines science, movement, and meaningful connection with others, a career as a PTA could be an excellent fit. This path may be a strong match if you:

- Are compassionate and enjoy helping others
- Have an interest in health, wellness, and exercise
- Prefer active, hands-on work
- Enjoy working with people of all ages and backgrounds
- Communicate and collaborate effectively
- Are detail-oriented and manage time well

Program Overview

Lake Michigan College will launch its PTA Program in **Fall 2027** at the South Haven campus. Each year, up to 18 students will be accepted through a competitive selection process for fall entry. This cohort size is determined by available faculty resources, laboratory space and equipment, and clinical education capacity to ensure a high-quality learning environment. All application requirements, including general education and prerequisite courses, must be completed and submitted by the deadline to be considered for admission.

The professional program is four semesters long and delivered in person to support hands-on learning and personalized instruction. The curriculum integrates classroom instruction, laboratory practice, and clinical education experiences in a variety of healthcare settings.

Students who successfully complete the four-semester professional program graduate in December and earn an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree. Graduates are eligible to sit for the January administration of the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE), the national licensure examination required for PTA practice.

Program outcomes, including graduation rates, licensure exam pass rates, and employment data, will be published on the PTA Program website as they become available.

Important Dates

Applications open: February 1, 2027

Application deadline: May 12, 2027

Program begins: Fall 2027

Anticipated graduation: December 2028

Application Requirements

Applicants must meet the following requirements to be considered for admission to the PTA Program. For questions, contact the Health Sciences Office at HealthSciences@lakemichigancollege.edu or (269) 927-8768.

General Admission Requirements

1. Submit a Lake Michigan College Application for Admission.
2. Submit all official transcripts from high school and colleges previously attended to the LMC Records and Registration office at records@lakemichigancollege.edu.
3. Graduate from high school or complete the GED prior to admission to the PTA professional program.
4. Be at least 18 years of age by the start of the PTA professional program.

Technical Standards and Essential Functions

The PTA Program and physical therapy profession require specific physical, cognitive, and interpersonal capabilities. Students must be able to perform these essential functions to be successful in both the program and profession. See Appendix A for a complete list of these requirements. Students with disabilities may be eligible for accommodations to meet these requirements. Contact Disability Support Services to discuss individual needs.

Required Coursework

All prerequisite and general education courses must be completed by the application deadline. Spring semester courses may be in progress at the time of application but must be completed with final grades posted by the application deadline. Courses must meet minimum grade, GPA, and timeframe requirements outlined below.

For questions about transfer credits or course substitutions, please consult your advisor and review your DegreeWorks plan in your Student Profile.

Prerequisite courses are weighted more heavily in the application scoring process. If you retake BIOL 110, HEAL 103, or EXSC 208, one point will be deducted from your total application score for each retake. Withdrawals do not result in point deductions.

General Education Courses[1] (completed with a minimum grade of C, minimum 2.5 GPA overall; no timeline requirement)	**Prerequisite Courses** (completed within 5 years, minimum grade of B-, minimum 2.75 GPA overall)
☐ ENGL 101 English Composition I – 3 credits	☐ BIOL 110 Human Anatomy and Physiology[2] – 4 credits
☐ ENGL 102 English Composition II – 3 credits	☐ HEAL 103 Medical Terminology – 2 credits
☐ MATH 122 Intermediate Algebra or MATH 123 Quantitative Reasoning – 4 credits	☐ EXSC 208 Kinesiology – 3 credits *(Must be taken at LMC; no transfer credit accepted)*
☐ PSYC 201 Introduction to Psychology – 3 credits	
☐ Humanities/Fine Arts Elective[3] – 3 credits	

Notes: [1]Students with a previous degree may be eligible for a general education waiver. Contact your advisor to discuss. [2]BIOL 110 may require additional credits or course substitutions for transfer students. [3]Acceptable Humanities/Fine Arts courses (100-level or higher): Art, Communications, Foreign Language, Humanities, Music, Philosophy, Drama, 200-level English courses, and select Honors courses (122, 171, 175, 195, 196, 204, 208, 256, 258).

PTA Program Information Session

All applicants must attend a PTA Program Information Session within 18 months of the application deadline. Sessions are held in the PTA lab (Room 220) at the South Haven Campus on the second Tuesday of February, April, August, and October from 4:00 to 5:00 PM, beginning February 2026.

Advance registration is required. To register, complete the online form. If you are unable to attend a scheduled session, individual appointments may be arranged upon request.

ATI TEAS

The ATI Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS) must be completed within 2 years of the application deadline. There is no minimum required score; application points are awarded based on your total TEAS score. Multiple attempts are allowed, with a mandatory 30-day waiting period between tests.

Applicants may take the TEAS either in person at LMC or online through ATI remote proctoring:

In-Person at LMC (Available in 2026)	**Online – Remote Proctored by ATI**
Cost $70	Cost $120
Registration Steps: 1. Schedule your TEAS exam by visiting the LMC Testing Services webpage for scheduling information and available testing locations 2. Arrive at the LMC Testing Services Center on your scheduled date 3. Staff will help you create your ATI account and pay the $70 fee	*Registration Steps:* 1. Visit the ATI TEAS registration website 2. From the TEAS tab at the top, select **Register for TEAS** 3. Under Online Testing, select **Register for Remote TEAS** 4. Choose **Select ATI Proctoring** 5. Choose **ATI Remote Proctor – Allied Health** 6. Select date/time 7. Complete registration and pay the $120 fee
Score Submission: Automatically sent to the College; no action needed.	*Score Submission:* One transcript is included; you must request ATI to send scores to Lake Michigan College.

Notes: Bring a valid government-issued photo ID. No personal items or electronics are allowed in the testing area.	*Notes:* Remote testing requires a valid government-issued photo ID, computer, webcam, stable internet connection, and quiet testing area.

Adequate preparation is strongly recommended, as your TEAS score directly impacts your application ranking. Study resources include ATI's official TEAS materials and free resources available through the College Library. Additional free practice tests and study tools are widely available online.

Physical Therapy Observation Hours

You must complete 20 hours of physical therapy observation under the supervision of a licensed PT or PTA within 2 years of the application deadline. While all hours may be completed at a single facility, we encourage exploring different settings to gain broader insight into the field. If you currently work as a PT aide or tech providing direct patient care, those hours will count toward this requirement. Administrative or non-clinical roles do not qualify.

A verification form must be completed by the supervising PT or PTA for each site. For detailed instructions and required documentation, see Appendices B and C in this guide.

Direct Patient Care Work Experience (Optional)

Direct patient care work experience is optional but can strengthen your application and provide valuable insight into the healthcare environment. Applicants who complete at least 100 hours in a qualifying role will earn 5 points toward their application score. Qualifying roles involve hands-on patient care and include PT Aide/Tech, CNA, Medical Assistant, Nursing Assistant, Resident Care Assistant, and similar positions. Administrative or clerical roles do not qualify.

To receive credit, submit a letter from your employer on company letterhead verifying your role and confirming completion of a minimum of 100 hours. The letter must include supervisor contact information. Submitted information may be verified. If you are unsure whether your experience qualifies, contact the Health Sciences Office for guidance.

Program Application Form

Lake Michigan College uses an online portal for Health Sciences program applications. The application opens February 1, and closes on May 12 at 5 PM EST. Access the application on the PTA Program website under "Apply to Program."

Applicants must be admitted to Lake Michigan College and use their LMC student email address to submit the application. All required documentation must be uploaded at the time of submission. Late applications and separately submitted materials will not be accepted. All application communications will be sent to the applicant's LMC student email address. For questions, contact the Health Sciences Office.

Application Checklist

- ☐ Be at least 18 years old before starting the program
- ☐ Meet technical standards and essential functions for safe patient care (see Appendix A)
- ☐ Apply to Lake Michigan College
- ☐ Submit official transcripts from all high schools, colleges, and/or GED programs (must reflect proof of graduation)
- ☐ Complete all prerequisite and general education courses within required timeframes, meeting minimum grade and GPA standards
- ☐ Attend PTA Program Information Session within 18 months of application deadline
- ☐ Complete ATI TEAS within 2 years of application deadline; arrange for official scores to be sent to LMC if taken remotely or at another institution
- ☐ Complete 20 hours of physical therapy observation within 2 years of application deadline with required observation form(s)
- ☐ Submit the electronic PTA Program application and upload the following documents within the application by the deadline:
  - Physical Therapy Observation Form(s)
  - Employer verification of qualifying healthcare experience (if applicable)

Application Submission and Deadline

Submit application and all required documents electronically by **May 12th at 5:00 PM**. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

Application Scoring

Application Points

Applications are evaluated using a 100-point system, with points earned according to the criteria below. Your final score will be your total points minus any deductions for course retakes.

Requirement	Calculation Method	Maximum Points
General Education GPA	Points = (Gen Ed GPA ÷ 4.0) x 20	20
Prerequisite GPA	Points = (Prerequisite GPA ÷ 4.0) × 55	55
ATI TEAS	Points = (TEAS total score ÷ 100) x 20	20
Direct patient care experience	Qualifying experience: 5 points All others: 0 points	5
Prerequisite course retakes	1 point deduction **per retake** of BIOL 110, HEAL 103, EXSC 208	Varies

Calculate Your Estimated Score

The Application Checklist and Points Calculator is an interactive tool that helps you track your progress toward program requirements. Based on the information you enter, it will:

- Identify remaining requirements
- Calculate your estimated application score
- Alert you to unmet grade or GPA requirements

Use this tool to stay organized, monitor your progress, and better understand how your efforts impact your application. For best results, use a desktop or laptop.

This tool is for personal use only. Information entered in this tool is not saved or submitted. Official points are calculated using your official transcripts and application materials.

Understanding Your Application Score

Your total points reflect the strength of your application based on published criteria. Admission is competitive and based on the highest-scoring applicants each year. Because scores vary by applicant pool, specific thresholds are not provided. Strong applicants demonstrate consistent performance across multiple areas. Focus on submitting your best overall application.

Admissions Decision

The 18 applicants with the highest total points will be offered admission for fall enrollment. In the event of a tie, the prerequisite GPA will serve as the primary tiebreaker, followed by the ATI TEAS total score and general education GPA if needed. Applicants will be notified of their admission status via email by June 15. Admitted students must confirm their seat by the stated deadline and complete all College enrollment and registration requirements to matriculate and begin coursework. Attendance at the PTA Program Orientation held in August prior to fall classes is required for enrollment in the program. Details will be provided with admission materials. Applicants who are not admitted may reapply during the next spring application period. The program does not maintain a waitlist.

Program Course Sequence

Once admitted to the PTA Program, students will complete the following professional courses in sequence. The program includes three Clinical Education courses (I, II, and III), requiring full-time clinical experiences of 4 weeks, 6 weeks, and 8 weeks respectively.

1st Semester (Fall), 12 Credits	Credit Hours	Contact Hours
PTA 110 Professional Practice I	2	2
PTA 115 Applied Biomechanics	2	3
PTA 120 Fundamentals of Patient Care	4	6
PTA 125 Musculoskeletal Interventions I	4	6
2nd Semester (Spring), 12 Credits	**Credit Hours**	**Contact Hours**
PTA 140 Clinical Neuroscience	3	3
PTA 155 Physical Agents	2	3
PTA 165 Musculoskeletal Interventions II	4	6
PTA 170 Clinical Education I	3	7
3rd Semester (Summer), 12 Credits	**Credit Hours**	**Contact Hours**
PTA 210 Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation	3	3
PTA 220 Neuromuscular Interventions	4	6
PTA 230 Clinical Medicine	2	2
PTA 240 Clinical Education II	3	9
Fourth Semester (Fall), 11 Credits	**Credit Hours**	**Contact Hours**
PTA 255 Musculoskeletal Interventions III	2	3
PTA 260 Special Populations	3	3
PTA 270 Clinical Education III	4	12
PTA 290 Professional Practice II	2	2
Totals	**47**	**76**

Note: All PTA courses must be completed at LMC; transfer credit for PTA-specific coursework is not accepted.

Program Expectations

The PTA program maintains high standards to prepare students for entry-level practice. Students must follow all policies outlined in both the College Student Handbook and PTA Program Handbook, which is provided upon acceptance. The following highlights key program requirements and expectations.

Academic and Performance Standards

A minimum grade of 77% (C+) is required for final course grades, written exam averages, and skill assessments. Faculty provide individualized support to help students meet these requirements. The College offers additional resources including tutoring, writing assistance, and disability support services.

Professional Expectations

Students must consistently demonstrate professional conduct, including punctuality, preparedness, accountability, respect, and integrity in all interactions. Students are expected to maintain a positive attitude

and contribute constructively to the learning environment. This includes taking initiative, welcoming feedback, and demonstrating a growth mindset when facing challenges. Students must also engage respectfully with individuals from all backgrounds, recognizing that varied perspectives and experiences enrich the learning environment. This commitment to diversity and inclusion prepares students to provide individualized, compassionate care in clinical practice.

Hands-on Learning

Hands-on patient care is fundamental to the physical therapy profession. In the PTA Program, students gain practical experience through hands-on learning in both lab and clinical settings. In lab, students alternate roles as clinician and patient while practicing techniques and providing peer feedback. Students then apply these skills with actual patients under direct supervision in clinical settings. Students must be comfortable with appropriate physical contact necessary for patient care, such as transferring patients, assisting with mobility, guiding exercise, and performing manual techniques. Students should also be prepared to encounter bodily fluids and manage medically complex situations in a variety of healthcare settings. All interactions must be conducted with the utmost professionalism, respect for patient dignity, and strict adherence to therapeutic boundaries.

Schedule and Attendance

Students participate in 20–25 hours per week of scheduled activities, including lectures, labs, and open lab sessions, typically held four days per week. Occasionally, required activities may be scheduled outside of regular hours with advance notice. Clinical experiences require full-time attendance (40 hours/week).

Attendance is mandatory for all class, lab, and clinical sessions. Students must plan personal commitments around academic and clinical schedules; absences should occur only for illness or unavoidable emergencies. More than one absence in any course or clinical experience is considered excessive and will prompt a faculty review to evaluate academic progress and professionalism.

Dress Code

Students are expected to maintain a professional appearance throughout the program. Program-approved scrubs are required for classroom and laboratory courses, and a program-approved polo shirt with khaki or business casual pants is required for designated professional activities. Clinical attire is determined by the assigned clinical site. Students requiring modifications to the dress code for religious, cultural, or personal reasons should consult with program faculty to discuss reasonable accommodations. Complete uniform requirements and ordering information will be provided at orientation following admission to the program.

Non-Discrimination Policy

The PTA Program upholds Lake Michigan College's commitment to equity and inclusion. Lake Michigan College is an equal opportunity institution, providing access to enrollment, employment, and services without discrimination based on age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetics, national origin, protected veteran status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law. View LMC's full Non-Discrimination Policy.

Clinical Compliance

Compliance Requirements

Healthcare facilities require students to meet specific health and safety standards to protect patients and healthcare providers. PTA students must meet these requirements in order to participate in clinical experiences. Detailed instructions and completion deadlines will be provided after admission to the program.

1. Criminal background check
2. Drug screening
3. Health certification form completed by healthcare provider
4. Required immunizations:
    a. MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)
    b. Hepatitis B
    c. Varicella
    d. Tdap (within 10 years)
    e. Annual influenza
5. Two-step TB screening or blood test, with annual updates
6. Basic Life Support (BLS) Provider from the American Heart Association (must remain current)
7. Reliable transportation (may travel up to 75 minutes to clinical sites)

Personal health insurance is strongly recommended for all PTA students throughout the program. Students are responsible for any healthcare costs incurred during coursework or clinical education experiences, including emergency services received during off-campus educational activities. The College provides professional liability insurance coverage for students during required clinical education experiences.

Compliance Tracking

Students must purchase access to Exxat, a clinical education management system, to submit and maintain required health records and documentation. All health records and documentation must be kept current throughout the program. Detailed instructions will be provided upon acceptance.

Exemptions

Students may request exemptions from specific immunization requirements. Since clinical sites establish these requirements, they have sole authority to approve or deny exemption requests. While the program will make reasonable efforts to identify clinical sites that accept exemptions, available sites are limited and placement cannot be guaranteed. If clinical placements cannot be secured or if students cannot meet site requirements, they will be unable to complete required clinical experiences and therefore cannot complete the program.

To begin the exemption process, accepted students must contact the Health Sciences Office to obtain the Immunization Exemption Form and schedule a meeting with the PTA Program Director and/or Director of Clinical Education.

Program Cost

The following costs reflect estimated expenses for the four-semester professional PTA Program. Tuition is assessed per contact hour based on the College's current tuition rates. For the most up-to-date tuition and fee information, please visit the LMC Tuition and Fees webpage.

Item	Estimated Cost
Tuition (2026-2027)	Domestic ($192.50/contact hour) = $14,630 International ($376.50/contact hour) = $28,614
ATI TEAS (in-person at LMC)	$70
Course Fees	$703
APTA Student Membership	$90
Textbooks and online resources	$650
Exxat Fee	$128
CPR certification	$60
Program uniform (scrubs, polo)	$100
Health insurance, immunizations	Varies (not provided by LMC)
Total (based on Domestic Tuition)	**$16,431**

Many students significantly reduce their out-of-pocket costs through financial aid, scholarships, and state programs like the Michigan Community College Guarantee, which offers free in-district tuition and reduced out-of-district tuition for eligible students. LMC programs may also provide free textbooks to qualifying students. Visit the Financial Aid website for details. Those experiencing financial hardship are encouraged to contact the Health Sciences Office early to learn about additional support resources.

Residence Hall Housing

Students can live in the College's residence halls at the Benton Harbor campus, which is a 30-minute drive from the PTA Program location at South Haven. Housing options start at $5,500 per academic year, providing an affordable alternative to apartment living. Students can choose from triple-occupancy suites to single rooms with varying layouts. Learn more about residence hall options, costs, and amenities by visiting LMC Housing.

Professional Licensure

The LMC PTA Program meets the educational requirements for licensure as a PTA in all U.S. jurisdictions. Graduates of CAPTE-accredited PTA programs are eligible to sit for the National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE-PTA) following graduation. December graduates are eligible for the January testing window.

In Michigan, licensure also requires submission of an application, completion of a criminal background check with fingerprinting, and completion of required human trafficking and implicit bias training. Additional licensure requirements may vary by state. Students planning to seek licensure outside of Michigan should review the requirements of the state in which they intend to practice. Estimated post-graduation licensure costs are approximately $900.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the difference between a PT and PTA?

PTs and PTAs have distinct roles and educational requirements. PTs complete a doctoral degree (DPT) and perform patient evaluations, determine diagnoses, develop treatment plans, and supervise care. PTAs complete an associate degree and work under PT supervision to implement treatment plans, provide direct patient care, and document progress. PTs and PTAs work collaboratively as part of the broader healthcare team to support each patient's rehabilitation goals and recovery.

How much time should I dedicate to studying?

The PTA Program is academically rigorous. While study time varies by individual, most successful students dedicate approximately 2 hours per credit hour each week to review course material, practice lab skills, complete assignments, and prepare for exams. For a typical 12-credit semester, this translates to about 24 hours of weekly study time. Strong time management and consistent study habits are essential for success.

Can I work while in the program?

While enrolled in the PTA Program, many students maintain part-time employment. However, due to the program's intensive coursework and clinical requirements, we strongly recommend limiting work hours to no more than 12 hours per week and seeking flexible employment that accommodates academic commitments. Working more than the recommended hours while in the program significantly impacts academic success and is strongly discouraged.

How are clinical placements determined?

The Director of Clinical Education works closely with students to coordinate clinical experiences in diverse healthcare settings, ensuring exposure to different patient populations and treatment approaches. While we consider student interests and location preferences during placement, our primary goal is providing valuable learning experiences that develop well-rounded clinicians.

What career advancement opportunities are available for PTAs?

PTAs have numerous paths for professional growth and career advancement. PTAs can enhance their clinical expertise through continuing education courses and specialized certifications. Clinical opportunities include pursuing APTA's Advanced Proficiency Pathways in eight specialization areas such as pediatrics, geriatrics, oncology, and orthopedics. Leadership roles are available in clinic management, department supervision, and healthcare administration. PTAs can also pursue careers in education as clinical instructors, program faculty, or academic coordinators. Additionally, many PTAs advance their education through bachelor's degree completion programs in health-related fields, with some later pursuing Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) programs to become physical therapists.

Technical Standards and Essential Functions

The PTA Program and physical therapy profession require specific physical, cognitive, sensory, communication, and behavioral capabilities. Students must be able to perform these essential functions, with or without reasonable accommodation, to successfully participate in the program and profession. Students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. Contact Disability Support Services to discuss individual needs.

Physical and Motor Functions

- Perform patient positioning, transfers, lifting, guarding, and mobility assistance with the strength, balance, and control necessary for safe patient care
- Demonstrate sufficient manual dexterity for patient care tasks
- Apply therapeutic techniques with appropriate force and precision
- Operate therapeutic equipment, modalities, and assistive devices safely and effectively
- Respond promptly and appropriately to emergency situations
- Navigate clinical environments safely around patients, equipment, and obstacles

Sensory and Observational Functions

- Observe and monitor patient movement, posture, and responses from various distances
- Identify changes in patient status including physical appearance, movement patterns, and tissue changes during interventions
- Recognize and respond to non-verbal communication and behavioral cues
- Detect and respond to patient communications, equipment alerts, and emergency signals

Communication Functions

- Interact and communicate effectively with patients, families, and healthcare professionals
- Comprehend and convey information accurately and in a timely manner
- Document patient care accurately using electronic or written records
- Adapt communication methods to meet the needs of diverse individuals

Cognitive Functions

- Process, retain, and apply complex information required for patient care
- Analyze, reason, and make sound decisions in academic and clinical settings
- Implement and adjust interventions based on patient response and within the plan of care
- Adapt to changing clinical environments and situations

Behavioral and Professional Functions

- Demonstrate professional behavior and effective self-management in challenging situations
- Demonstrate respect, empathy, and cultural humility with individuals from diverse backgrounds
- Collaborate respectfully within healthcare teams to achieve shared goals
- Recognize personal limitations and seek appropriate assistance
- Uphold integrity, honesty, and responsibility in all program activities
- Adhere to ethical and legal standards of the physical therapy profession

Guide to Completing Physical Therapy Observation Hours

Introduction

Observation hours provide valuable insight into the physical therapy profession and help confirm your career choice as a PTA. While you may complete all hours in one setting, we encourage observing across different healthcare environments to gain broader exposure to patient care. Approach each opportunity with enthusiasm, professionalism, and a genuine desire to learn, as the impressions you make and insights you gain could influence your future career.

Requirements

- Complete 20 hours of observation under a licensed PT or PTA.
- Hours must be completed and documented within 2 years of application deadline.
- Complete an Observation Form for each facility where you conducted observations.
- Current PT aide/tech work hours qualify (document using Observation Form).

Finding Observation Opportunities

You will need to contact physical therapy facilities (outpatient clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, or skilled nursing facilities) to request observation opportunities. Consider asking family and friends if they know any PTs or PTAs who might be willing to help. Start this process early, as some facilities (especially hospitals) have additional requirements and longer approval processes before observations can begin.

When contacting clinical sites, introduce yourself as a student preparing to apply to the LMC PTA Program and request observation hours. Be professional, polite, and respectful in all communication, as this reflects on both you and the program. You can reach out in various ways:

- **Phone:** For hospitals or skilled nursing facilities, request to be connected to the physical therapy department first. Ask to speak with the person who coordinates student observations. If that person is unavailable, ask for their name and the best time to reach them.
- **In-Person:** Dress professionally and have your contact information (name, phone number, email) written down to leave with the facility. Visit during mid-morning or mid-afternoon, when clinics are typically less busy.
- **Email**: Use formal greetings (Dear Dr./Mr./Ms.) and professional closings (Sincerely, Thank you). Include your full name, contact information, and clearly state your request for observation hours.

Be flexible with scheduling to accommodate the clinic's availability. If you don't receive a response within a week, follow up politely. Remember that clinics are busy healthcare environments, so patience and professionalism are essential.

Professional Conduct During Observation

Professional behavior is required during your observation; hours will not count toward your application if professional conduct standards are not met. Students must demonstrate:

- **Professional appearance:** Wear clean business casual attire with comfortable closed-toe shoes, unless the facility specifies otherwise. Maintain good hygiene. Keep hair neat and secured if long. Minimize jewelry and avoid strong fragrances.
- **Punctuality:** Arrive 15 minutes early and stay for your entire scheduled time.

- **Respect:** Be courteous and mindful of others. Follow staff instructions, maintain appropriate boundaries, and protect patient privacy.
- **Engagement:** Stay attentive throughout your observation. Keep your phone silenced and stored away.
- **Communication:** Use appropriate language and tone when speaking with staff and patients. Listen attentively and ask questions when appropriate.

Use this opportunity to learn about physical therapy treatments and terminology. During downtime, you may offer to help with basic non-clinical tasks, such as folding linens, straightening treatment areas, or organizing equipment.

Thank each patient after their session and thank staff before departing. A simple "thank you for allowing me to observe" is appropriate. Ensure your Observation Form is completed and signed by your supervising PT/PTA before leaving.

After the Observation

Send a thank-you email to your supervising therapist within 48 hours of your observation. Include specific things you learned and express appreciation for the opportunity. Remember, these clinics may be your future employers or colleagues – a thoughtful thank-you helps build your professional network.

Make a copy of your signed Observation Form for your records, then upload the original to the application portal at the time of submission. Be sure all required fields are complete, including signatures and dates, before submitting.

Physical Therapy Observation Form

Print this form and bring to observation site. A handwritten signature is required.

As part of the PTA Program application requirements, complete 20 hours of physical therapy observation with a licensed PT or PTA within 2 years of the application deadline. Submit a separate form for each facility. All forms must be completed in pen. Professional conduct is required during all observations; hours will not be counted if conduct standards are not met.

Section 1: Student Information

Student Name:_____

Student Email:_____ Phone:_____

Section 2: Clinical Observation Details

Facility Name:_____

Facility Address:_____

Please indicate clinical setting (select all that apply):

☐ Inpatient (Acute/Rehab) ☐ Skilled Nursing Facility ☐ Outpatient ☐ School System

☐ Other_____

Observation date(s):_____ Total Hours Observed:_____

Description of observation:_____

_____

Section 3: Supervising PT/PTA Verification

Please verify the student's hours and conduct by initialing the hours statement and the appropriate conduct statement below. The PTA Program may contact you for confirmation.

_____ I verify that the student completed the observation hours documented above.

_____ I verify that the student consistently demonstrated professional conduct (appearance, punctuality, respect, engagement, communication).

_____ I verify that the student did not consistently demonstrate professional conduct. (If initialed, please contact the Program Director directly.)

PT/PTA Name:_____

PT/PTA Signature:_____ Date:_____

PT/PTA Email:_____ Phone:_____

Clinical sites: For questions or concerns, contact Sue Tomica, Program Director: stomica@lakemichigancollege.edu | (269) 637-7510.