ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS
for the
Physical Therapist Assistant Student

Becoming a physical therapist assistant requires the completion of an education program that is both intellectually and physically challenging. The student will be expected to acquire knowledge, motor skills, and behavior and attitudes that are necessary to provide ethical, safe, effective, compassionate patient care. The purpose of this document is to inform candidates to the physical therapist assistant (PTA) program of the demands that they can reasonably be expected to meet, with or without reasonable accommodation, while participating in the program.

Decisions made by the candidate to this program should be made with consideration of the following standards. These standards reflect reasonable expectations of the PTA student for the performance of common physical therapy functions encountered in the program. They are also reasonable expectations of employers; however, employers may have different standards. The ability to meet these standards with or without reasonable accommodation does not guarantee employment upon graduation.

Each candidate in this Associate in Applied Science degree program should possess the following abilities and skills:

- **Motor:** The candidate needs sufficient motor capabilities to execute the movements and skills necessary to provide safe and effective physical therapy treatment. This includes, but is not limited to:

  1. Sufficient coordination, speed, strength and agility to assist and guard (protect) patients who are walking, exercising or performing other activities.
  2. Ability to adjust, move and position patients and equipment which involves bending, twisting, pushing and pulling, and reaching in order to guide, transfer and lift equipment and individuals.
  3. Ability to guide, resist, and assist patients, and to provide emergency care, which involves activities including standing, kneeling, sitting, walking and crawling.
  4. Ability and dexterity to manipulate the devices used in physical therapy, in order to adjust gauges, dials, small nuts/bolts, and equipment settings.
5. Sufficient endurance to move about a classroom or clinical environment steadily throughout the workday including movement across distances, movement from one floor to another, negotiation of small spaces.

**Sensory:** Candidate should have sufficient sensory abilities to assess and monitor patients, observe physical movement, participate in physical measures, and recognize and respond to patient needs and unsafe situations. Candidate should have the ability to obtain information in classroom, laboratory or clinical settings through observation, auscultation, palpation and other measures, and requires abilities including, but not limited to:

1. Visual ability (corrected as necessary) to recognize and interpret facial expressions and body language, identify normal and abnormal patterns of movement, to read or set parameters on physical therapy equipment, to discriminate color changes, and to interpret and assess the environment.
2. Auditory ability (corrected as necessary) to recognize and respond verbal directions and requests, auditory timers, equipment alarms, and to effectively use devices for measurement of blood pressure.
3. Tactile ability to palpate pulses and muscle contractions, to detect changes or abnormalities of surface texture, skin temperature, body segment contour, muscle tone, and joint movement.

**Communication:** Candidate will need to communicate effectively and efficiently with peers, faculty, patients and their families, and other health care providers orally, in writing, and non-verbally. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Ability to read and write at a level that allows the essential functions of an assignment to be completed safely and effectively.
2. Ability to effectively articulate and interpret information to patients, family members, other health care professionals and third party payers as appropriate.
3. Ability to recognize, interpret, and respond to nonverbal behavior of self and others.

**Behavior:** Candidate should be capable of exercising good judgment, developing empathic and therapeutic relationships with patients and others, working in stressful situations, and tolerating close physical contact with co-workers and patients. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Ability to work with multiple patients/families and colleagues at the same time.
2. Ability to work with lab partners, patients, families and others under stressful conditions.
3. Ability to prioritize multiple tasks, integrate information and make decisions.
4. Ability to work with individuals of varying socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
5. Ability to consistently provide act in the best interests of patients/clients and promote a therapeutic environment.
6. Ability to work collaboratively with all (both male and female) PTA students and 
with program faculty in classroom, lab and clinical settings. Among other things, 
participation in lab situations which require the student to “role play” both the 
care provider and patient for common physical therapy conditions is required. 
This will involve exposing areas of the body for treatment simulations including 
the hip, neck, upper and lower back, ribs, abdomen, shoulder, knee, foot, elbow, 
wrist, and hands.

- **Critical Thinking:** Candidate should possess sufficient abilities in the areas of 
calculation, critical problem solving, reasoning, and assessment to be able to 
comprehend and process information in a timely manner. Candidate will be asked to 
prioritize, organize and attend to tasks and responsibilities efficiently. This includes, 
but is not limited to:

1. Ability to collect and interpret data.
2. Ability to prioritize multiple tasks, integrate information and make decisions.
3. Ability to apply knowledge from basic and technical education to the provision of 
physical therapy care.
4. The ability to problem solve in order to act safely and ethically in the physical 
therapy lab and clinic.

- **The capstone experience** of this educational program occurs during the final quarter, 
when the candidate provides physical therapy care in clinic settings under the 
supervision of physical therapists. The candidate should have the capacity to 
complete eight to ten hour days, and 40-hour weeks, in clinical education experiences 
for twelve consecutive weeks. The clinical education experience provides for an 
integrative measure of the candidate’s capabilities, requiring that the candidate 
consistently demonstrate skill and proficiency of performance at the level of a 
physical therapist assistant.

**Additional information:** In order to be eligible for placement at a clinical education 
site, students admitted to the program will need to:

1. Obtain certification (health professional level) in cardiopulmonary resuscitation 
through an approved course for health care providers.
2. Complete an approved 7-hour course for health care providers on blood borne 
pathogens.
3. Provide proof of health status including but not limited to proof of MMR and 
chicken pox vaccination, hepatitis B vaccination (or signed waiver), current 
tetanus immunization, and current TB test.
4. Complete a Washington State Patrol background check  (Children and Vulnerable 
Adults Act)

Candidates for the Physical Therapist Assistant Program are required to certify that these 
standards have been provided to them. Applicants may request reasonable 
accommodation to meet the standards. Accommodation is arranged through the
Disability Support Services office. Additional information about requesting accommodation is available at [http://www.greenriver.edu/DSS/](http://www.greenriver.edu/DSS/).

Students with disabilities are expected to perform all the essential functions of the program with or without reasonable accommodation. The PTA Program will work with the student and the campus disability office to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations. While every effort will be made to accommodate disability-related needs, it is important to note we are not required to provide accommodations that fundamentally alter the essential functions or technical standards of the program.

**Physical Therapist Assistant Application**

**Essential Functions Acknowledgment**
Please sign and return this portion of the document to the admissions coordinator with the application packet.

My signature acknowledges that I have reviewed the document “Essential Functions” for PTA students and am familiar with its content. I understand that I may request reasonable accommodation in order to meet the standards.

Name (please print): ______________________________________________________

SID Number ___________________________

Signature: ____________________________________________  Date: _____________