

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

Background Information About This Guide

My name is Calvin Lee and I am currently a student physical therapist at Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions. I graduated from University of Hawaii at Manoa in Spring 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences. I hope to guide you through the process of preparing for and applying to physical therapy school. This guide includes general information regarding PTCAS and insights I have gained throughout the application process. Specific scenarios such as the exact requirements for various physical therapy programs may not be included, but I will go over some of the less-common requirements that I have come across. This includes details regarding applying as a UH Manoa or Hawaii student as there are some specifics that you may not be familiar with.

A general rule that will be repeated throughout this guide is to check PTCAS for the program that interests you. PTCAS is where you will get all the specific requirements for applying.

<https://ptcasdirectory.apta.org/39/List-of-PTCAS-Programs?qst=>

Components of the application:

Courses/GPA

Observation Hours

Other Experiences

GRE

Personal Statement

Supplemental Essays

Letter of Recommendation

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

Courses/GPA (Matriculant Data)

2017-2018 Application Cycle Average Matriculant GPA was 3.57

Most common majors are Exercise Science (28.39% of Accepted Applicants), Kinesiology (16.85% of Accepted Applicants), Biology (8.94% of Accepted Applicants)

Common requirements:

- General Biology + Labs
- General Chemistry + Labs
- General Physics + Labs,
- Statistics* (see * below)
- Pre-Calculus
- Psychology (Abnormal/Developmental)
- Anatomy + Physiology + Labs

Based on the average matriculant GPA, you should strive to have a GPA much higher than 3.57 to ensure that you are a competitive applicant. If the physical therapy prerequisites courses are pulling your GPA down, heavily consider retaking those classes.

It doesn't matter what your major is, as long as you meet the prerequisites for the program you are applying to. However, if you haven't decided on a major or are just entering college, understand that certain majors have most PT school prerequisites within the major's graduation requirements which will save you time. This is the reason most applicants are exercise science, kinesiology, or biology majors. UH Manoa's Biology and Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Sciences graduation requirements may cover all the prerequisites to some physical therapy programs.

*One of the potential courses that students may run into trouble with is statistics. Different departments have their own statistics class, but some programs require that it be

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

taken from the math department or psychology department. If you have already taken a statistics course from a different department, you may want to find out whether the school(s) allow for a syllabus submission/course equivalence document (many schools do).

Observation Hours

Physical therapy programs usually require observation hours anywhere from 0-100 hours (this does not mean you should not observe). Some schools will give an average number of observation hours on their PTCAS program prerequisites (some schools report an average of 600 hours). Therefore, most applicants have several hundred observation hours to make themselves competitive.

Of the schools that require hours, many will require a minimum number of hours within a variety of settings such as: 20 hours in outpatient (most common), 20 hours in inpatient/subacute, and 20 hours in acute. Be sure to check for the specific program's requirements.

Ideally, you should start observing as early as possible to not only learn as much as you can, but to show your interest in the profession as well. Also, any opportunity that is available to you for inpatient shadowing is one that should be taken. In Hawai'i, observation in the inpatient setting (especially acute and sub-acute settings) is relatively hard to find. Many hospitals have limited spots for volunteers/observing in the acute care setting. Also, they often have many policies that require certain procedures/requirements for volunteers and shadows to fulfill such as interviews and trainings/orientations.

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

If you are having trouble finding volunteer/shadowing opportunities, ask your advisor(s) as they often have some contacts. Another way, if you have the time, is to volunteer at a hospital through a non-physical therapy or non-medical section (which are usually more available) and talk to your supervisor about your interest in PT and ask if there might be a chance to shadow, when the time is right.

****Do not forget/abandon your **commitment** to the original place you are volunteering.****

Once you have found a clinic willing to let you observe/volunteer, be sure to document the number of hours and have a physical therapist (PT) sign it. You do not have to get their signature every time, but before you end your observation/volunteering, you need to have it confirmed with the PT. When you decide to fill out your PTCAS application, you will need to have the PT verify the observation hours online (most are familiar with this). The PTCAS application resets every cycle, so I would not recommend making an account to document hours if you are not planning to apply that cycle. There may be a way of carrying over information from a previous cycle, but I'm not familiar with it.

Other Experiences

This section of your PTCAS application is where you will list out the experiences that make you more than just "a student applying to physical therapy school." This section allows you to show your interests and/or non-physical therapy experiences. Clubs, sports, jobs, observing another type of clinician, or any other meaningful experience should be entered.

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

More and more often, schools/programs (in any field/major) are looking for students that can do more than just study. They are looking for individuals who are self-motivated and self-directed—show them that you are!

GRE (Matriculant Data)

| Average Matriculated Male GRE Percentiles | Average Matriculated Female GRE Percentiles |
|---|---|
| Verbal: 50.54% | Verbal: 53.15% |
| Quantitative: 50.42% | Quantitative: 45.22% |
| Analytical: 51.86% | Analytical: 59.76% |

The GRE, also known as, Graduate Record Examinations, is a standardized test that is required for a variety of graduate programs. The GRE is 3 hours 45 minutes and consists of writing, math (AKA quantitative), and reading (verbal). As shown above, GRE percentiles of accepted applicants are just slightly the 50th percentile. Therefore, to ensure that you are a competitive applicant, you should strive to obtain a GRE score well above the 50th percentile. Be sure to study the prep books (there are many out there) and take multiple practice exams in preparation for the GRE.

Keep in mind that the GRE will take several weeks to months to prepare for (depending on how quickly you learn the material). An option is to prepare and take the exam while you are on summer break. Many students will take the exam in the summer between their junior year and senior year to have it completed approximately when PTCAS opens (July). However, if you have decided on a gap year, the next summer is also an option. You can also retake the GRE.

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

Do not forget to send your GRE scores to the correct program (code) before the deadline. You can find the GRE codes for the schools that you are interested in here:

<https://ptcasdirectory.apta.org/5254/GRE-Requirements-and-Codes-by-Program>

Also, consider writing down the code(s) for each program that you are interested in on a sheet of paper and bringing it to the test site. You will be able to input the codes after the exam (the first several score reports that you send are included in the test fee). Be sure to check with the testing site on the process of bringing in the sheet of paper (you cannot bring anything with you into the room when taking the test, but should be allowed after taking the test). Check the GRE website on how many you can send for free, testing centers near you, etc.

Personal Statement

This section is your main “personal” opportunity to show who you are and ultimately why you should be accepted into their program. A well-written personal statement can be the factor that puts you above another student. However, a poorly written personal statement can also ruin your chance of getting into school. This personal statement essay should have the following two components: an answer to the prompt (changes approximately every two years) and why you want to be a physical therapist. There are many guides online on how to write a personal statement.

A personal statement needs to be **personal**. Keep in mind that the people reading your essay have read hundreds of essays prior to yours. Clichés and regurgitated résumés are not personal and will not leave an impression on your audience. Instead, focus on a particular

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

theme or idea that can support your essay. A possible format of writing personal statements is through storytelling. Although it is a common technique, you will make it unique by using a personal story.

Here are a few things to keep in mind (my personal tips):

- People are very good at remembering stories/narratives and not very good at remembering random lists.
- Make the essay flow (make sure sentences and paragraphs are making smooth transitions and not breaking randomly).
- If there is a central point, be sure to remind the reader throughout the essay.

Supplemental Essays

Some programs may require an essay(s) that is separate from the PTCAS application.

Questions that I have encountered are: “what can you bring to the program?” “how extensively have you explored the various settings in which physical therapists practice?” “what have you learned about _____ university that influenced your decision to apply?”

Like your personal statement, make sure that you find something unique to write about. You want the reader to remember something about you after he/she has well finished reading your essay. A general rule to follow is to stay away from single statements like, “I’m an effective communicator,” “I’m a hard worker,” but have your examples/stories speak those qualities.

Letter of Recommendation

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

Most schools require three letters of recommendation. Most likely, the school will require two physical therapists and one professor within your major (I recommend asking a professor that teaches something relevant to physical therapy such as anatomy/physiology or kinesiology). Ensure that you have a good relationship with the person you are asking and that they know you on a personal level. Letters of recommendations are extremely valuable to programs because they are strong pieces of evidence of whether you are a student that can handle the academics of graduate school and ultimately fit to be a physical therapist. PTCAS will ask the reference to provide overall rating of the student.

While this is not a section that you do not have absolute control in, be sure to do the following:

1. Be a volunteer/shadow that truly shows interest in the profession. Be a role model student and **obtain a high-letter grade in the class.**
2. Check the specific program and see who they require letters of recommendation from.
3. **Formally** ask the person to write your letter of recommendation **at least a month in advance.** This means setting a time to talk to them individually and asking them if they would write you a letter of recommendation **for physical therapy school.**
4. You do not necessarily have to do this—tell them some of the qualities that the school is looking for (check the physical therapy program's website).
5. **Ask** the person if they need any information from you such as GPA, grade you got in their class, etc.
6. Make sure the person writes your letter of recommendation by the due date.

Understand that they are busy with their jobs and may need a reminder.

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

FAQ / My Experience

1. Are schools waiving the required number of shadowing hours?

I am not aware of any programs waiving the required number of shadowing/observation hours. If you are struggling to find shadowing experiences because of COVID-19, I suggest delaying your application. You should not look at the shadowing hours purely as a requirement, but instead an affirmation that you want to be a PT. I recommend that you ask the PT that you are shadowing what they enjoy/do not enjoy about their job. You will find that majority of PTs will say something related to insurance or documentation when it comes to the things they do not like (huge topic in the physical therapy/medical area).

2. What is your best advice on applying to physical therapy school?

Research the program well. One aspect that is not usually shown on websites is clinical internship details. I have met some students from other schools that were sent to clinics, for their clinical internship, that were unideal due to location or type of setting. If there are many programs in the area or if your program has few connections, you may be sent to places very far or expensive. Consider where you might want to practice as a physical therapist (state/city or type of setting) and ask the program if they have students or clinic affiliations in those areas.

3. What kind of experience do the schools prefer?

I do not think there is necessarily a specific experience that schools prefer—besides shadowing/observation. However, considering that you are going into a health profession, any experiences within the health/medicine field are desirable. Also, leadership is a common theme

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

that comes up (since you will have to be one as a PT). Therefore, any experiences that show your leadership skills are beneficial.

4. Why did you pick PT over OT?

I did not pick one over the other. My general interest lies in gross movement activities like sports or other recreational activities, as opposed to specific tasks of daily living such as cooking, showering, and laundry. That is not to say that PTs do not do anything to rehabilitate patients to return to tasks such as cooking and shower, or that OTs do not rehabilitate patients to return to sports whatsoever, but there is a large distinction between the two. For example, in the hospital setting, a PT does not do patient shower training. However, a PT does work on standing tolerance and balance that will improve the patient's ability to do tasks such as showering when doing so with the OT or after discharge.

5. Have you done internships?

I did an internship with the Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific's Cancer Rehabilitation Program, which is now offered through UH Manoa's KRS program (KRS 488 I believe). I suggest asking your advisor about it.

6. How long did you study for the GRE? Did you take the GRE multiple times?

I studied very sporadically for 1 month. I took the GRE twice, but scored about the same the second time. I ended up not studying very much between the first and second exam due to time constraint. I highly suggest that you dedicate time and study regularly. Many schools have minimum score requirements and not having a high GRE score can limit the number or choice of schools.

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

7. What is something you wish you did or had more experience in before beginning physical therapy school?

I wish I had asked someone or knew someone that went through the process of applying to physical therapy school. Throughout the process, I wanted someone's opinion about whether I was doing something well—mainly my personal statement. Instead, I asked friends and family that were either adept at writing or understood the type of work that was needed for graduate school applications.

8. Did you apply to physical therapy school right after undergrad? How was the process?

I began the application process to physical therapy school during the summer between my 3rd and 4th year. It was a very difficult process because I was in school, preparing for the GRE, working part-time, doing my internship, getting observation hours, and running a club. I think that you should consider what situation you are in and when you would be happy to start graduate school. Most of the physical therapists/physical therapy students I know took one gap year. Also, be prepared to fly to the school for an interview.

9. If you could only give one piece of advice to anyone about physical therapy school, what would it be?

Be open minded, especially when you are in physical therapy school. You will learn a lot about the profession, types of patients, specialties, and much more. Hopefully, you find something that you are interested in, but do not miss out on learning opportunities even if they are not exactly related to your interests.

A Guide to Applying for Physical Therapy School for the University of Hawaii at Manoa/Hawai'i Student

Written by Calvin Lee

Sources

Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service 2017-2018 Applicant Data Report(Rep.).

(2019, March). Retrieved May 12, 2019, from American Physical Therapy Association website:

http://www.ptcas.org/uploadedFiles/PTCASorg/About_PTCAS/PTCASApplicantDataRpt.pdf