Frequently Asked Questions

What is a PTA?
A Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) is an educated, skilled, and licensed health care worker. Under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist, the PTA helps people of all ages who have health-related conditions that limit their ability to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. Job activities of a PTA may include helping a person to exercise or learn to use crutches, providing electrical stimulation, paraffin baths, applying hot or cold packs, traction, and ultrasound treatments. PTAs are responsible for recording patient responses to treatment and reporting progress. Clients seeking physical therapy may be accident victims or individuals with disabling conditions such as arthritis or head injury or may be recovering from surgery or sports injuries. PTAs work in a variety of settings including hospitals, outpatient clinics, home health, nursing homes, schools, sports facilities, and more.


Academic Requirement: A PTA possesses an Associate of Applied Science Degree

What is a PT?
A Physical Therapist (PT) is a highly educated, skilled, and licensed health care professional. PTs examine patients’ medical histories, then test and measure their strength, range of motion, balance and coordination, posture, muscle performance, respiration, and motor function. They also determine the patient’s ability to be independent and reintegrate into the community or workplace after injury or illness. The physical therapist develops patient treatment plans describing a therapy strategy, its purpose, and the anticipated outcome. PTs work in coordination with PTAs to restore, maintain, and promote client fitness and health.

Academic Requirement: A PT must possess a degree at the Masters level or above. Most educational programs for physical therapists now culminate with a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree.

For more information about physical therapy as a profession, visit the American Physical Therapy Association at http://www.apta.org/
**Will having a degree in PTA help me to become a PT?**

PTA and PT are ordinarily considered distinct academic paths. In general, a PTA program is not a stepping stone to a PT program and technical courses in PTA program are generally not transferrable to a PT program though general education coursework may be accepted in transfer.

**Does a PTA have a license?**

In most states, PTAs must have a license. The Alabama Board of Physical Therapy requires that an applicant for licensure as a physical therapist assistant must first have completed a program of physical therapy education approved by the Physical Therapy Association’s Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). The Alabama Board of Physical Therapy grants qualified applicants a license following satisfactory completion of a written examination.

A Board policy states, “Licensure shall be refused to any applicant who is of other than good moral character and the determination as to what constitutes good moral character and reputation shall be solely within the judgment of the Board.” [http://www.pt.alabama.gov/](http://www.pt.alabama.gov/)

**What physical capabilities are required of a PTA?**

The CCC PTA Program has adopted a list of “Essential Functions” which delineates the physical, behavioral, and cognitive abilities needed to complete the physical therapist assistant curriculum and to competently perform as a physical therapist assistant upon graduation. The Essential Functions can be found in the PTA Program Application.

CCC provides environmental and programmatic access for persons with documented disabilities. Any student who desires information or services for a disabling condition should contact Ms. Dawn Hale at the office of Services for Special Student Populations, 256-306-2630.

**How can I find out more about the CCC PTA program?**

Read the current year Physical Therapist Assistant Program Application packet and attend a PTA Information Session. Dates & times of upcoming sessions, which are held several times each year, are posted on the PTA Program web page.

**When does the program begin?**

A new class of twenty-four (24) PTA students is enrolled each fall semester. The program consists of five semesters of consecutive PTA classes which must be taken in sequence and only students who have applied to the program and have been accepted are allowed to enroll in PTA courses.

**How many students are admitted to the program each year?**

Twenty-four (24) students are admitted once a year.

**Can you start the program in spring or summer semester?**

No. A new class of students begins each fall. The five semesters of sequential PTA courses build on the knowledge gained in the previous semester.
How can I apply to the CCC PTA program?
Applications are available on-line. If you are unable to download or print an application you may pick up a copy in the Allied Health Department offices on the 3rd floor of the Health Sciences Center, Decatur Campus between the hours of 8:00 AM – 3:00 P.M., Monday through Thursday or request a copy by email. You are advised to

START THE APPLICATION PROCESS WELL IN ADVANCE

When can I apply?
Applications for the next class of PTA students starting fall semester 2015 will be accepted beginning in January 2015 by the Allied Health Sciences Secretary on the third floor of the Health Sciences Center, Decatur campus. **Deadline for application submission is Wednesday, April 1st, 2015 at 3:00 P.M.** No application submitted past this time will be considered. Make certain your PTA Application Packet states “PTA Program Application 2015” on page one.

What must I do to apply to the PTA Program?
The minimum requirements for admission to the CCC PTA Program are listed in the application packet, page two. Applicants must:

1. Meet all admission requirements of Calhoun Community College
2. Submit a current year PTA Program Application
3. Have completed 24 hours of physical therapy observation experience which is documented and signed by licensed PT personnel
4. Submit a 2-3 page type-written essay discussing the observation experiences
5. Submit two (2) professional recommendations in the requested format
6. Submit an ACT Reading Score or COMPASS Reading Placement Test Score from the past 3 years
7. Submit an unofficial CCC transcript documenting all previously completed applicable coursework taken at Calhoun or accepted in transfer by the CCC Office of Admissions and Records

What classes or courses must I first take in order to apply to the PTA Program?
There are no “prerequisite” classes which must be taken prior to application to the program. However, completion of some or all of the general education courses required for the associates of applied science degree in PTA will improve your application score and therefore your chances of being offered enrollment. Acceptance into the program is competitive and students are selected based on the published point system.

How are students selected for enrollment in PTA?
Because only 24 students can be enrolled each fall, there is a point system used to evaluate each candidate. Completion of general education coursework as well as the grades obtained in these classes is heavily weighted as students who have demonstrated academic success in these foundational classes will best be poised for success in the rigorous PTA program. Points are also assigned for professionalism
as demonstrated by physical therapy observation experiences, a written essay, and professional recommendations. See the application for further details.

PTA APPLICATION SCORING SYSTEM

- Up to **65 points** may be earned based on the completion of any or all of the required general education courses and the grades received in each course. Scoring details can be found in the 2015 PTA Program Application.
- Up to **10 points** are awarded based on an ACT or COMPASS Reading Score from the past three years. Scoring details can be found in the 2015 PTA Program Application.
- Up to **5 points** can be earned by attending ONE PTA Information Session
- Up to **5 points** can be earned for completing and properly documenting 24 hours of physical therapy observation.
- Up to **7.5 points** are awarded for an essay which discusses your physical therapy observation experiences.
- Up to **7.5 points** can be earned based on two (2) professional recommendations submitted per instructions found in the PTA Program Application.
- **Total possible = 100 points**

Points are awarded on the basis of the information provided by the applicant. Candidates will not be awarded points if a Calhoun Community College transcript demonstrating general education courses completed with the grade received and reading scores are not submitted with the application packet. Similarly, incorrect documentation of observation hours, opened letters of recommendation, and hand written journals will not be considered for points.

READ ALL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS WHICH ARE MISSING THE REQUESTED DOCUMENTATION WILL RESULT IN THE APPLICANT NOT BEING CONSIDERED.

START THE APPLICATION PROCESS WELL IN ADVANCE
What general education courses are required for an Associate of Applied Science degree in PTA?
The general education courses are listed on page 6 of the PTA Program Application

- **English Composition I** - (ENG 101) – this is the only English course that may be used for application points.
- **Intermediate College Algebra** - (MTH 100) – is the “lowest” MTH course needed for the PTA AAS degree. Applicants may also claim any “higher” MTH course and grade for application points by highlighting it on the general education worksheet.
- **General Psychology** - (PSY 200)
- **Human Growth & Development** - (PSY 210)
- **Speech Elective** – such as Fundamentals of Oral Communication (SPH 106), or Fundamentals of Public Speaking (SPH 107), or Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (SPH 116)
- **Humanities Elective** - (such as an Art, Music, Foreign Language, Philosophy, Religion, Theatre, Literature – see page 39 of the current CCC Catalog for more information.) Applicants may select which humanities course and grade they wish to claim for application points by highlighting it on the general education worksheet.
- **Microcomputer Applications** – (CIS 146)
- **Human Anatomy & Physiology I & II** - (BIO 201 & 202) – must have been completed within the past 10 years.
- **Medical Terminology for Health Professions** (EMS 106)

**GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED AND THE GRADES RECEIVED THAT YOU ARE CLAIMING FOR APPLICATION POINTS MUST BE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE UNOFFICIAL CCC TRANSCRIPT SUBMITTED WITH YOUR APPLICATION.**

What if I plan to take some of the classes spring semester?
Points for general education courses taken spring semester 2015 (during the application submission period) will be added to the application score if an unofficial copy of course completion with the grade earned is submitted to the Allied Health Secretary. This is the responsibility of the applicant and the documentation must be received no later than 3:00 P.M. on Thursday, May 21, 2015.

Because of the short time between the end of the semester and the deadline, SPRING GRADES from other colleges may be submitted on an unofficial transcript from that College. **THE APPLICANT must send or deliver spring grades to the CCC Allied Health Secretary by the deadline. **THE CCC ADMISSIONS OFFICE DOES NOT FORWARD GRADES TO THE ALLIED HEALTH DIVISION.

What if I took some/all of the general education coursework at another college?
At least one month prior to application to the PTA Program, you should apply for general admission to CCC and under intended academic program list “PTA”. Have your transcripts from all other colleges you’ve attended sent to the CCC Office of Admissions and Records as soon as possible. Admissions and
Records will evaluate your previous college work to determine which, if any, courses fulfill the PTA degree requirements.

**Note:** Only the CCC Office of Admissions and Records may determine if coursework transferred from other institutions meets the general education requirements for the PTA degree. **DO NOT SUBMIT TRANSCRIPTS FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS WITH YOUR PTA APPLICATION.**

- **IF YOU HAVE TAKEN CLASSES AT CCC:** Classes accepted in transfer will appear on your unofficial transcript which is accessible via MYCALHOUN. A copy of this is “OK” to turn in with your PTA application packet.

- **IF YOU HAVE NEVER ATTENDED CCC:** Once all of your transcripts from other institutions you have attended reach the CCC Office of Admissions and Records, they will need at least two weeks to complete a transcript evaluation. Once completed, you will be able to print an unofficial CCC transcript, accessible via MYCALHOUN to submit with your application. If you have questions about course transfer, please contact the Office of Admissions & Records at 256-306-2593.

**How do I know if coursework taken at another college with transfer?**

**The only** way to know if classes taken at another institution will transfer and apply to a degree in PTA is to have your transcripts evaluated by the Office of Admissions and Records. A minimum of two weeks should be allowed for the evaluation of transfer credit.

**What if some of my transfer credit is CLEP?**

CLEP credit must first be accepted in transfer by the CCC Office of Admissions and Records. PTA application points for CLEP credit are assigned by averaging the letter grades obtained in other completed general education courses.

**Do I have to re-take my ACT or COMPASS?**

All applicants to the PTA Program must submit an **ACT Reading Score** or **COMPASS Reading Placement Test Score** taken within the past three years. COMPASS testing is available free of charge and by appointment on both campuses.

Call one of the Advising Centers to schedule an appointment:

Decatur: 256-306-2648      Huntsville/Research Park: 256-890-4770

*You will be asked to present your photo I.D. at the time of your exam.*

**Do not wait until near the application deadline to schedule an appointment to take a COMPASS test.**

**Preparing for the COMPASS Placement Exam**
There are two websites you can visit to help you prepare for the COMPASS exam. The websites provide types of questions you may expect and sample questions are available to help you prepare for your exam.

I.
- Visit the ACT website at http://www.act.org/compass/student/index.html
- Find links on the left side of the page to see Test Taking Tips and Sample Test Questions

II.
- Visit Calhoun’s website at www.calhoun.edu
- From the home page click on STUDENT SERVICES.
- From the menu select ADVISING CENTERS and then STUDY FOR THE COMPASS
- You may also make an appointment for testing on-line.

What if my ACT Reading Score is less than 18 or my COMPASS Reading Assessment score is less than 80?
ALL APPLICANTS regardless of prior academic achievement are required to submit an ACT Reading Score or COMPASS Reading Assessment score from a test that was taken in the past three years with your application even if the score is less than 18/80. You may want to check with the Advising Office to see if you are eligible to (re)take the COMPASS in an attempt to improve your previous score. Scores less than 18/80 will not be awarded application points but you are still eligible to apply for admission to the PTA Program.

What is the minimum GPA I must have to be admitted to the PTA program?
There is no “minimum” GPA. Applicants are awarded points (see pg. 8 of the application) based on the grades obtained in the required general education courses for a degree in PTA which have already been taken and successfully completed.

How can I acquire physical therapy observation hours?
PT and PTA students are commonly required to obtain observation hours and therefore physical therapy facilities are accustomed to such requests.

- Contact local physical therapy providers of your choice to request an appointment to obtain the required hours.
- Take the Observation Documentation Form in the PTA Program Application packet with you. All hours must be signed by a licensed Physical Therapist or Physical Therapist Assistant. Electronic signatures will not be accepted.
- Follow the directions on the Observation Documentation Form.
- Arrive on time and remember to dress and act as a professional.
- Note that the 24 hours of observation experiences submitted with the PTA Application should have been completed within the past 3 years.
**Inpatient** observation hours are accrued at a hospital or rehabilitation center where patients spend the night. **Outpatient** observation hours should be completed at a physical therapy center which provides treatments for patients who travel to the facility for a scheduled appointment. **Home health care** physical therapy is not accepted for the purpose of observation hours.

**What if I am employed by a physical therapy provider?**  
Students who are employed in a physical therapy department may use regular work hours from the past three years to fulfill observation hour requirements. If you work at an outpatient facility the hours can be used for outpatient. Likewise, if you work at an inpatient facility, your hours can be used as inpatient hours. Work hours should be listed on the Observation Documentation Form and signed by a licensed PT or PTA.

**What if I have observation hours documented on a form for another school?**  
Observation hours properly documented on other forms will be accepted with your application to the CCC PTA Program if they can be verified for authenticity. Be certain the hours are clearly delineated as inpatient or outpatient. Remember that all hours must be signed by a licensed PT or PTA.

**How many observation hours do I need? Should I get more than the minimum?**  
**Twelve in-patient** and **twelve out-patient hours** are required for a total of **24 hours**. Additional time spent observing the working environment, job duties, and special skills of PT's & PTA's may be personally helpful in deciding if physical therapy is the right vocation for you but will **not necessarily add to the strength of your application to the PTA Program**.

**May I use my own experience as a patient receiving physical therapy care as observation hours?**  
Yes, if your experience was **within the past three years**. Please note the date, times, facility, and if your experience was in-patient or out-patient therapy. Have your therapist verify these hours by their signature.

**How recent do my observation hours need to be?**  
**Within the past three years**. The supervising PT or PTA of your observation hours may be contacted for verification of your time in the facility.

**What about the essay?**  
As noted in the application directions, the essay should discuss your physical therapy observation hours. This may include the kinds of health problems requiring physical therapy you encountered, the types of treatments you observed and/or the goals of treatment, the role of the PTA and/or PT and any insights you gained as a results of your experiences.

The essay should be typed using a standard font, standard spacing and margins, and be 2-3 pages in length.
What about the professional recommendations?
Two (2) confidential professional recommendations using the form supplied are required when applying to the PTA Program. Teachers and employers are good professional resources for recommendations, not friends or someone who is related to you. References are asked to evaluate professional behaviors including your ability to manage stress, accept constructive criticism, maturity, your relationships with others and conduct. Choose individuals to complete your references wisely. Someone who has known you for a short period of time may be unable to rate you on some measures.

Note the directions on the second page of the recommendation. Each form should be sealed by the person completing the recommendation in a letter-size envelope and signed across the seal before being returned to you. Both professional recommendations should be submitted, still sealed, in your application packet.

What about the Information Sessions?
At least three information sessions are held periodically throughout the year to provide individuals interested in the program the opportunity to learn more details and ask questions. Dates and times of upcoming sessions are posted on the PTA Program web page. Applicants who attend an information meeting receive up to 5 application points. Attendance at only ONE session is needed. You do not need to pre-register to attend a meeting.

If you are unable to attend an information session because of distance or other hardship, please contact the program director regarding the application points.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR APPLICANTS

• READ & FOLLOW APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS – DON’T IGNORE DIRECTIONS OR TRY TO BE “INNOVATIVE” WHEN SUBMITTING THE REQUESTED DOCUMENTATION
• MAKE CERTAIN ALL PARTS OF YOUR APPLICATION ARE NEAT & LEGIBLE
• DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE – APPLICATIONS ARE ACCEPTED BEGINNING JANUARY 1ST BUT NOT PAST 3 PM ON APRIL 1ST
• A COMPLETED APPLICATION IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY - DO NOT REQUEST HEALTH DIVISION STAFF TO CONFIRM THAT YOU HAVE INCLUDED ALL REQUESTED INFORMATION IN YOUR APPLICATION ENVELOPE
• COURTESY AND PROFESSIONALISM ARE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

When will I be notified if I’ve been accepted into the PTA program?
Each application is individually evaluated including the verification of transcripts and observation hours. Journals, essays and professional recommendations are evaluated by members of the Admissions Committee and points assigned according to a grading rubric. Final decisions will be made in late May and letters will be mailed in early June to all applicants at the address provided on the application.
Is there a waiting list?
Yes and no. Twenty four students will initially be invited to enroll in the PTA Program in the fall. A small number of students will receive a letter stating they are on a waiting list in the event that an offered slot is not filled. Waiting list applicants will be notified of an opening in the program that fall in order of application score. Waiting list individuals are not “carried over” to the next year. If you are not accepted into the program, you must reapply the following year.

What expenses are involved in the Program? Approximate costs:

- In-state tuition, based on 72 hours, = $9432 (tuition + fees) + $2500 (books + additional expenses) = $11,932
- Out of state tuition, based on 72 hours = $17,136 (tuition + fees) + $2500 (books + additional expenses) = $19,636

Do I have to have a background check, a physical examination, drug testing, or have taken CPR to apply to the PTA Program?
None of the above are required to apply to the PTA Program. However, all will be needed once you are enrolled to comply with the requirements of our clinical facilities. DO NOT PROCEED WITH HEALTH EXAMINATIONS, BACKGROUND CHECKS, or CPR UNTIL DIRECTED TO DO SO. If a background check or a confirmed positive drug screen renders a student ineligible to participate in clinical experiences, they will be dismissed from the PTA Program.

Background Check – General Guidelines
CCC Health Science students will be accepted to participate in a clinical rotation if their background check reveals:

- No history of criminal offenses
- Misdemeanors for expired or failure to obtain a hunting or fishing license
- Misdemeanors for traffic or moving violations (excluding DUI)
- Any single misdemeanor over 2 years old

Students will not be allowed to attend clinical rotations if their background check reveals:

- Any misdemeanor less than 2 years old that is related to crimes against the person (such as assault and battery), crimes based on dishonesty or untruthfulness (such as theft or embezzlement), or drug and other substance abuse related crimes.
- A felony conviction less than 5 years old.
- A felony conviction that is a crime against a person such as battery or assault.

A student will be considered for clinical rotations on a case by case basis if their background check reveals:

- Any felony that is crimes based on dishonesty or untruthfulness (such as theft or embezzlement) or drug and other substance abuse related crimes AND more that 5 years old (all decisions made by the review committee are final and may not be appealed.)
- Multiple misdemeanors regardless of length of time since offense (all decisions made by the review committee are final and may not be appealed).“
How many semesters are there in the PTA program?
The program is 5 semesters in length, incorporating both the PTA and general education classes necessary for the degree. The general education courses are sequenced in the curriculum plan to support learning in the PTA program. Students may elect to take the general education classes in any order or complete prior to enrollment in the program. The one exception is Medical Terminology (EMS 106) which must be successfully completed before or by the end of the first semester enrolled in PTA. General education courses must be taken and passed with a C or higher prior to graduating from the program.

All PTA courses must be taken and successfully completed in the order delineated by the curriculum plan. Five semesters are required even when all general education coursework has been completed prior to enrollment.

What is involved in PTA lab courses?
Many PTA classes include laboratory hours for learning skills. Courses with lab components require hands-on participation with other students and lab attire that allows practice on, palpation of, and observation of body segments. For female students this includes a halter top or sports bra and shorts which allow for exposure of the hip joint and thigh. Male students must also wear similar shorts and upper body covering that allows exposure of the trunk, front and back.

What are “clinical experiences”?
In addition to on-campus classes, each student will have three clinical rotations while in the PTA program. When the student is on a clinical rotation he/she will be assigned to a clinical facility full time to practice as a Student PTA with a licensed PT or PTA as a clinical instructor who will supervise the student for the duration of the clinical rotation.

Clinical rotations are scheduled Monday through Friday, generally between the hours of 7:00AM and 5:00PM, full time. Health care facility assignments are based on the learning needs of the student, not geographical proximity to the home. Students must have reliable transportation, flexibility in their personal schedules, and the willingness to commute to clinical sites throughout north Alabama and southern Tennessee.

Clinical rotations provide the student the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and techniques learned in the classroom and lab setting.

Prior to assignment to a clinical facility a student must undergo a background check and drug screening, purchase medical malpractice insurance, and completed a healthcare provider CPR course.

Will I be able to work and attend the PTA Program?
The program requires commitment. Successful students report studying approx. two hours for each contact hour of lecture classes per week. Sound study skills and time management are critical to
achievement in the PTA program. Therefore, it is recommended that students do not work more than 20 hours per week. Classes and clinical experiences will be scheduled during the day Monday through Friday and student attendance is required. See the CCC Catalog for Attendance Policies.

**The PTA Program Application says the grading policy is different. Why is that?**
The PTA program grading policy is more stringent than the general college grading policy. In order to pass a PTA course the student must receive a grade of 75% or greater. Students who do not receive a minimum of 75% as a final grade in a course will not be allowed to progress in the program. It is the belief of the faculty that having a strict grading policy will help to better ensure student knowledge and competency.

**Are PTA classes at CCC offered by distance education or in the evenings?**
All PTA classes will be scheduled during day time hours, Mondays through Fridays on the Decatur campus only. There are no distance education PTA classes.

**Which campus?**
All PTA classes will be held on the Decatur campus in the Health Sciences Center.

**Is the PTA Program accredited?**
The Physical Therapist Assistant Program at Calhoun Community College is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE), 1111 North Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; telephone: 703-706-3245; email: accreditation@apta.org; website: [www.capteonline.org](http://www.capteonline.org).

Any person may submit to CAPTE a complaint about an accredited program. CAPTE will investigate and take action on any complaint filed in accordance with its’ *Rules of Practice and Procedure*. 