DPT PROGRAMS: ADMISSIONS CONSIDERATIONS AMID COVID-19

During this time of transition, uncertainty, and split decisions we know there is a lot of information coming your way. Given the multiple variables in how undergraduate colleges and universities are responding to these unprecedented times, we encourage you to maintain an open mindset of flexibility and equity while maintaining the integrity of your admissions process.

Hopefully the information provided will help you when making decisions on how to move forward with your admissions process and matriculate students that uphold and embody the mission and vision of your program, your institution, APTA, and the profession.

Nonqualitative and Binary Grading Terminology

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused most institutions to adjust the way they deliver courses as well as the way they deliver grades. Many have switched to some type of hybrid between traditional grading and increasing the availability of nonqualitative or binary options.

Different institutions are handling grading in different ways, which means the terminology will differ. Here are some examples (not an exhaustive list) of various nonqualitative and binary grading terminology you might see:

- Pass/fail
- Satisfactory/unsatisfactory
- Credit/no credit
- Pass/no record
- Pass/marginal pass/unsatisfactory
- Credit/general credit/no credit
- Incomplete extraordinary circumstances (IE)/pass extraordinary circumstance (PE)/no credit extraordinary circumstance (NCE)
- Satisfactory (S)/satisfactory but deficient (SD)/no credit (NC)

The terminology may be different, but we encourage you to think about applicants' grades on a broader scale so that the decisions you make will encompass the majority, if not all, possible scenarios.

School Mandates on Traditional vs Nonqualitative or Binary Grading

Following are statistics from [The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers](link) (AACRAO) on changes at academic institutions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, from:

- 95% of institutions have moved to all online/remote courses, and that number has probably increased since the survey was released.
- 63% of graduate institutions are giving students the option to change one or more of their courses to pass/fail or a similar nonqualitative or binary grade.
- 68% of undergraduate institutions are giving students the option to change one or more of their courses to pass/fail or a similar nonqualitative or binary grade.
- 13% have made a mandatory change to pass/fail or a similar nonqualitative or binary grade.

Most applicants will have been able to choose between receiving a letter grade or a nonqualitative grade such as pass/fail; however, some will not. Keep this in mind when ensuring equity in your admissions process. For example, an applicant may submit a transcript that:

- Has no pass/fail courses.
- Has courses taken voluntarily as pass/fail prior to COVID-19 and courses that were required to be taken as pass/fail after COVID-19.
- Has only pass/fail courses during COVID-19.
- Has all spring semester 2020 courses with pass/fail grades.
- Has prerequisite courses with pass/fail grades.

GPAs

PTCAS will not factor pass/fail grades into the applicant's GPA but will show the pass/fail grades as it always has. This means that GPAs calculated in PTCAS may differ from GPAs found on transcripts and self-reported by applicants. This is not a change from previous years as PTCAS has always accepted pass/fail courses from applicants. There is no change to this policy from previous cycles.

Not all pass/fail grades are equal, as some institutions consider a C as passing while others consider a D as passing. Also, not all pass/fail grades are calculated into GPAs the same way:
- Some institutions will factor a passing grade into the GPA but not a failing grade.
- Some institutions factor only failing grades into the GPA.
- Some institutions will not factor any pass/fail grades into the GPA.

Transcripts

PTCAS continues to receive and process official transcripts. If applicants have the ability send an official transcript (electronically or via mail) PTCAS will process, verify, and upload those transcripts to the application.

PTCAS understands that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, some applicants may not be able to obtain official transcripts from all colleges and universities they attended. To assist applicants with this hardship, PTCAS will grant applicants an exception and allow them to upload unofficial transcripts instead. For applicants who believe they need this exception, they'll want to follow the detailed instructions listed in the applicant help center.

Applicants who are unable to obtain an official transcript can visit the applicant help center for a step by step process to requesting a transcript exception. Once granted, the applicant can visit the document section of the application to upload their unofficial transcripts to the application. Applicants will need to apply for an exemption to each college or university listed that they are unable to obtain an official transcript for. The document upload for unofficial transcript will automatically be available to applicants, there is nothing the programs need to do to enable this feature.

The decision to accept an unofficial transcript in the absence of an official transcript is entirely up to the program. Keep in mind:
- Some applicants may have issues or delays in getting their official transcripts in on time.
- Some applicants will have a delay in processing their degree, which means there will be a delay in obtaining their final transcript.
- Some institutions will denote the circumstance for the choice of grades on the official transcript, some will denote it only on the unofficial transcript, and some won't denote at all. (?)
- Add text on unofficial transcripts field

Applicants are strongly encouraged to include an official transcript if possible and they will be instructed not to upload unofficial transcripts or apply for the exemption.

Physical Therapy Observation Hours

Due to the pandemic it's become more challenging for applicants to complete required observation or shadowing hours in different setting types and to receive signoff on completed hours. This is especially hard for applicants looking to complete hours at an outpatient clinic as most of those clinics have moved to telehealth and many have closed their doors altogether. Also keep in mind that many physical therapists now are at home and may not be checking their professional emails as often. As a result, even if applicants completed observation hours prior to the pandemic, it's possible they have not yet received official sign-off on completed hours.

Different institutions are handling physical therapy observation hours in different ways. For example:

- Some programs are considering reducing the number of settings an applicant is required to complete hours under.
- Some programs have begun to think about accepting observation hours without a signoff from a physical therapist.
- Some programs have moved their completion date for observation hours back to give applicants additional time.
- Some programs are giving applicants until the spring and summer of 2021 to complete required hours and receive approval,

In preparation for the launch of the PTCAS 2020-21 (next) application cycle, programs could consider moving in the direction of "recommending" instead or "requiring" a specific number of hours from applicants

Reference Requirements

As with observation and shadowing hours, it could be difficult for applicants to receive reference letters from physical therapists, and the response time on those letters could be delayed. Things to consider:
- With universities and colleges moving classes to an online format and many faculty members now teaching from home, it's possible many may not check emails as often over the next several months.
- Programs may want to consider allowing applicants additional time to submit letters of reference throughout the summer and early fall, or to reduce the number of references required.

GRE Testing

ETS now allows applicants to complete GRE testing online with a webcam and proctor. [(Learn more on the ETS website.)](#) Even so, different institutions are handling GRE testing and scores in different ways. For example, some programs have moved away from requiring the GRE and are moving toward "recommending" the exam for the upcoming cohort. For programs requiring GRE scores, we recommend that you consider the challenges applicants are facing in completing the GRE test and consider allowing for additional time.

Interviews

Programs may want to consider moving interviews to an online process. This can be done several ways, keeping in mind that not all applicants have the same access to basic needs and tools:
- Use prerecorded methods such as KIRA or other video platforms.
- Use live video conferencing such as Zoom or other platforms.
- Use phone interviews for applicants who may not have access to a web camera or other technology.

We encourage programs to consider the answers you receive from applicants and try not to focus on their environmental factors.

Additional Resources

PTCAS: http://www.ptcas.org/COVID-19/
APTA: http://www.apta.org/Coronavirus/
CAPTE: http://www.capteonline.org/uploadedFiles/CAPTEorg/Homepage/CAPTEResponsetoCOVID19.pdf
APTE: https://aptaeducation.org/members/covid-19-physical-therapy-education.cfm
AACRAO: https://www.aacrao.org/resources/covid-19-crisis-practices/transfer-credit-from-covid-19-impacted-terms