



# Accreditation Handbook

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American Physical Therapy Association  
1111 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

[accreditation@apta.org](mailto:accreditation@apta.org) / [www.capteonline.org](http://www.capteonline.org)

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## PREFACE

This Handbook is intended to provide the reader with information about accreditation in physical therapy education. To accomplish this, the Handbook includes the following information:

- Introductory information includes background information about accreditation in general and specialized accreditation more specifically; CAPTE's mission and vision; and, CAPTE's definition of quality in physical therapy education.
- CAPTE Rules of Practice and Procedure outline the parameters under which CAPTE operates;
- The Evaluative Criteria used by CAPTE in the review process;
- Additional information of interest to programs involved in the pre-accreditation and accreditation process; and
- Position papers adopted by CAPTE to provide clarification regarding interpretation of the Evaluative Criteria as well as other topics.
- Expectations related to conflict of interest and confidentiality
- History of the involvement of the American Physical Therapy Association and the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) in specialized accreditation of physical therapy education programs;

The Handbook includes descriptions of the processes and procedures, as well as the persons who are involved in the accreditation program, to provide the reader with an overview of the accreditation program. Descriptions of the procedures in which both developing programs and previously accredited programs must participate, as well as descriptions of official documents that are used in making accreditation status decisions, are provided to inform the reader of all activities required that lead to the pre-accreditation status of Candidate or to an accreditation status classification.

The Handbook is intended for a variety of readers: representatives of institutions and programs who are considering establishing an educational program in physical therapy, faculty and officials of programs under review, members of on-site teams, and the general public interested in or affected by the quality of education in physical therapy. It is not the intent of this Handbook to provide copies of the many **forms** utilized in the accreditation program or to duplicate information relative to the on-site visit that is published in the *Manual for On-site Reviewers*.

It is imperative that any user of this Handbook who may be preparing documentation and/or official materials for submission to the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education obtain copies of the most recently revised and published forms, and to consult staff of the Accreditation Department when any question relating to the accreditation process arises.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background Information

Accreditation is the process by which an agency or organization evaluates and recognizes a program of study or an institution as meeting certain predetermined qualifications or standards.<sup>1</sup> Five steps are basic to the process:

1. Establishment of standards and/or criteria for evaluation
2. Self-evaluation or self-study by the institution or program preparatory to an on-site visit
3. Evaluation of the institution or program by competent authorities to determine if the institution or program meets the standards/criteria
4. Publication of a current list of institutions or programs that meet the standards/criteria
5. Periodic re-evaluation of the institution or the educational program to determine whether the institution or the program continues to be in compliance with the standards/criteria

Accreditation involves a continuing process designed to help an institution or program analyze its functions and mission, assess its performances, review its planning procedures and identify ways to increase its educational effectiveness. Essentially, accreditation serves to protect the welfare and safety of the public. Through accreditation, institutions, such as colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools, hospitals and clinics and scientific laboratories that serve the public are identified as meeting certain standards of quality.<sup>2</sup> Accreditation is thus a method of protecting the public by identifying qualified institutions and by helping to raise and maintain institutional standards; it is a judgment that an institution or program is providing the quality of educational services that society and the institution's and program's peers have a right to expect. In health professions, as in other specialized professions such as law and engineering, accreditation complements but differs from licensure or certification, whereby the states and some professions identify **individuals** who are competent to perform professional duties.

During the past century the philosophy of accreditation has dramatically shifted from that of a policing activity to one of providing educational institutions with assistance and guidance to insure the continued development of quality educational programs. As such, accrediting agencies have become increasingly more involved in providing early consultative or advisory services to institutions developing new educational programs. Although the primary role of an on-site visit is evaluative, this step also provides opportunity for an important consultative service to the program being reviewed. **The enhancement role is no less important than the evaluative role of accreditation** and each serves to complement the other. The major contribution of the accreditation process in education today is the assurance of quality education through consultation and evaluation.

Accreditation of an educational program in physical therapy is a significant milestone in the development of the program. This achievement is noteworthy and commendable and should be thought of as the first activity of many that the program will make to keep pace with the rapidly changing profession of physical therapy. The concepts in accreditation activities are in a state of constant change also. Program resources and activities may have a tendency to become static unless there is a system of self-evaluation in place to assure that changes in the program reflect the dynamic changes that are taking place in physical therapy research, education, and practice.

Resource evaluation alone is rarely sufficient to assure quality so it is imperative that the educational programs implement careful processes to monitor the performances of their graduates. Evidence must be obtained that assures the accrediting body that the educational institution and specifically the physical therapy program monitor the performances of the graduate and that the graduates are indeed able to

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<sup>1</sup>Seldon, WK: Accreditation. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>National Commission on Accrediting, "Facts about the Commission", April, 1972.

demonstrate successful achievement of the goals of the program. Thus the Commission encourages each program to obtain regular feedback from a variety of sources about the performances of its graduates. Regular collection and evaluation of these outcome measurements will help facilitate ongoing curriculum evaluation, revision and enhancement, and thus help assure up-to-date, quality programs.

Authority of the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) for accreditation of the education programs for the preparation of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants is derived through APTA House of Delegates Policies: HOD 06-91-07-09 and HOD 06-89-33-73. Since 1977, national recognition of CAPTE has been derived in the public sector from the United States Department of Education (USDE) and in the private sector from the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) and its successor organizations, the Commission on Recognition in Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CAPTE was most recently reviewed by USDE and CHEA in 2006.

### **CAPTE's Mission and Vision**

The mission of the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education is to serve the public by establishing and applying standards that assure quality and continuous improvement in the entry-level preparation of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants and that reflect the evolving nature of education, research and practice.

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) will be recognized and valued by all stakeholders as the leader in accreditation of entry-level physical therapy education, serving as a model of best practices in specialized accreditation in the United States.

CAPTE will pursue this vision through

- Collaborative processes that foster a culture of assessment, accountability and continuous improvement to support program and institutional excellence.
- Standards that are influenced by contemporary and evolving practice and that help assure that physical therapy continues to meet the needs of a diverse public.
- Standards that foster consistency in educational programs and that allow for innovation resulting in improvement in educational practices and in the profession.
- Decisions based on systems of review that are discerning, objective, and accepted as trustworthy, effective and valid by its communities of interest.

### **Definition of Quality in Physical Therapy Education**

A quality educational program is one that prepares graduates for competent and ethical practice, career flexibility and the values associated with the profession. Quality also mandates an educational experience that prepares individuals for lifelong learning, which is essential to future practice. To achieve quality, certain characteristics of the program must be in place

- A mission and philosophy that are congruent with and supportive of the institutional mission
- Policies, procedures and practices that protect the rights and safety of all those involved with the program
- An environment conducive to learning
- Sufficient resources to support the program and curriculum
- A qualified faculty, committed to effective teaching and student learning, to service and, in the case of physical therapist education programs, to scholarship
- A comprehensive and organized curriculum that leads to the development of the competencies necessary for entry into the profession
- An organized method for obtaining and analyzing feedback from the community of interest that allows the program to engage in assessment and continuous improvement

*Judging quality is not easy. It cannot be reduced to quantitative indices or formulas. Such judgments are made by gathering appropriate information about an institution or program and by having knowledgeable people appraise it.*

*This is the essence of accreditation.*

- COPA, 1986