Physical Therapy School: Preparing for the Application Cycle

*During your time at UMBC – Things that should be done every semester.*

1. Declare Pre-Physical Therapy as your professional track. You have to fill out a “Undergraduate Declaration of Major, Minor, and Certificate” form and turn it in to the Registrar’s Office (<https://umbc.app.box.com/v/declarationofmajorform>)
2. Meeting with the Pre-Professional advisor to discuss your game plan. It is recommended to see her at least once a semester!
3. Build relationships with your professors early so that you can ask for a letter of recommendation from them later
   1. Note: There is a limit to the number of letter of recommendations a reference can write in one cycle. If you need/want a letter of recommendation from a professor in one of your pre-requisite courses, make sure to **ask early**! There is a huge possibility that many other Pre-PT students want a LOR from the same professor!
4. Get involved in your community, network, and build your resume

*During school breaks (especially summer breaks)*

1. Get observation hours in a variety of settings—most programs require at least 50 to 100 hours. Make sure that you are getting these hours under a licensed physical therapist in each setting or your hours will NOT count!
   1. Get paid hours working as a physical therapy technician, rehabilitation aide (if there is a licensed PT), or rehabilitation tech
   2. Get volunteer hours working as a physical therapy intern or volunteer
   3. Get a variety of hours—outpatient and inpatient (inpatient can be done in hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation homes)
   4. Make sure to always apply early! There is usually a lot of competition for hours during the summer season.
2. Look up potential programs to apply to on PTCAS
   1. If you have time, schedule an on-campus visit or attend open houses to learn more about the programs and get to know the faculty and/or student body
   2. Keep record of the schools that you are interested in and make sure to do research on those schools as well.
   3. Make sure to research the pre-requisites for each program because they do vary among all schools. Once you do this, factor those pre-requisite courses into your four-year plan
3. Dedicate time to take the GRE—take it as soon as possible to avoid stress or mistakes during the application cycle. Research the deadlines for all your schools, so you are aware of the latest possible date you can take your GRE and get official scores by deadline
4. Prepare for the application cycle—PTCAS usually opens during the first week of July
   1. Draft a personal statement and have it proofread by a trusted individual such as someone from the career center, a friend, mentor/professor

*If you plan on attending physical therapy school right after your graduate from UMBC*

1. You must start applying the summer before your senior year
2. Once the cycle opens, send your transcripts and GRE scores (if applicable) to PTCAS and send letter of recommendation requests to all references.
   1. Your pre-requisite courses should be completed by now. However, there are some programs that allow a maximum of two incomplete pre-requisite courses at the time the application is submitted. These pre-requisites must be completed by the time the PT program begins. Make sure to email the admissions committee of desired school to be 100% certain
   2. For letters of recommendations, make sure to email your references as soon as you send out invitations. Tell your references to be on the lookout in their emails. If they have not received invite, send out another invitation or tell references to check spam. If this does not work, contact PTCAS immediately
3. If you are applying for early decision, you can only apply to one school. You can apply to other programs if you get waitlisted, rejected, or put in the regular pool for your early decision application. I recommend looking at the deadlines for your programs to see if early decision will be in your best interest
4. When you get offered an interview, schedule a date that does not interfere with exams and take advantage of the career center to practice interview skills
   1. Practice commonly asked questions and do your research on the school
   2. Shop for professional clothes
5. When you get accepted, you usually have 2 weeks to commit to the program (unless you did early decision). If you are 100% sure that you will not be attending a specific program, it is recommended to email the school ASAP because there are probably dozens of other students waiting for your seat. Afterwards, celebrate! You deserve it!!!

*Taking gap years before physical therapy school*

1. You must start applying to physical therapy school the summer before the anticipated start date of the program
   1. For example: Harold graduates in May 2020 and wants to take one gap year. He knows that the UMB DPT program does not start until May every year. His anticipated start date for PT school is May 2021. He will need to start applying to UMB in July 2020.
2. Gap years are great for those who want to get more experience, retake classes, save money, or even self-reflect!
3. Once you are ready to apply to PT school, follow the last section.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out! 😊