DPT Class of 2020 Earns 100% First-Time NPTE Pass Rate

Georgia State University’s Doctor of Physical Therapy 41-person Class of 2020 has earned a rare 100 percent first-time pass rate on the National Physical Therapy Exam (NPTE).

The graduates, now licensed to practice, join an elite national group. According to the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy which administer the exam, only eight physical therapy programs out of 247 nationwide had a 100 percent first-time pass rate in 2018-2019.

“It is not easy to get all 41 students in a class to pass the first time, and definitely not with all the anxieties of an ongoing pandemic,” said Sujay Galen, department chair and associate professor of physical therapy.

Additionally, two students in the 2020 class, Emma Davis and Luke Tidwell, earned an 800 out of 800 top score on the exam.

Congratulations to Emma and Luke, and to all of the DPT Class of 2020 on this fantastic accomplishment!

Message from the Chair

Greetings,

The challenges of 2020 have yet again strengthened our resolve to be our best, work together as a team, and strive for excellence. We started the year with the news that our DPT program has risen 65 places in its ranking and is now placed among the top 75 DPT programs in the nation and ranked #2 in the state of Georgia. This is a testament to the excellence and dedication of our faculty and students. Our faculty, Dr. Liang-Ching Tsai was promoted to the rank of associate professor and received tenure, and Dr. Carla Huggins was promoted to the rank of clinical associate professor this year, and I congratulate both of them on their achievements. Also this year, we specially thank Dr. Carolyn Crutchfield for establishing the Marylou R. Barnes Endowed Faculty Award that will award faculty development funds to physical therapy faculty who show potential for leadership in teaching, service, and scholarship.

A strong team produces exceptional results, and in this newsletter we share with you the success we have celebrated in 2020, and I thank everyone who played a role in our success I thank our alumni for their continued support in many ways, and I invite all our alumni to join our GSU PT Alumni Network. Let us together make the next decade, a decade of excellence for our department and our profession we all love. Together we move onwards and upwards.

Best wishes,

Sujay Galen, PT, PhD, FHEA, Chair and Associate Professor
Spotlight on the DPT/PhD Program

Georgia State’s DPT/PhD program, under the direction of Dr. Brad Farrell, PhD, is an exciting opportunity for students interested in teaching and research. Students enrolled in the program will earn a PhD in Kinesiology with a concentration in Rehabilitation Science while completing their DPT.

Rachel Potter, SPT, one of the students currently enrolled, is excited about how she believes obtaining these dual degrees will expand her career options.

“Teaching has always been a goal of mine and I’ve been interested in research since assisting in kinesiology research [during my undergraduate studies],” she said.

After completing her degree, Potter hopes to combine her newfound expertise with her training as a National Board-Certified Health and Wellness Coach and study the effects of motivation on patient compliance, as well as the effects of incorporating more motivational interviewing and lifestyle changes into traditional physical therapy practice.

“I’m not positive yet where this step in my academic journey is going to take me,” said Potter, “but I’m excited for the possibilities!”

Dr. Carla Huggins Elected to Board of ACAPT DEI Consortium

Dr. Carla Huggins, PT, DPT, clinical associate professor and director of clinical education, has been elected to the board of ACAPT’s DEI Consortium. The ACAPT (American Council of Academic Physical Therapy) Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Consortium is one of several consortia that serve within this national organization. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) consortium’s purpose is to promote real change that supports increased accessibility and opportunities for everyone in education and the profession of physical therapy. The DEI consortium will promote increased accessibility, inclusion, acceptance of differences, and opportunities for all stakeholders involved in PT education. Dr. Huggins was elected to the Nominating Committee, and although her term doesn’t officially begin until October 2020, she has hit the ground running! Dr. Huggins has been coordinating a listening session to be held on October 29, 7pm/EST entitled "DCEs, SCCEs and CIs' Reflections on the Black DPT Clinical Education Experience," where she will serve on the panel along with Georgia State alumnus Dr. Andre’ Bell, PT, DPT.

New Faculty Join Georgia State DPT

Two new faculty members joined the PT department in 2020.

Dr. Gena Henderson, PT, DPT, PhD, PCS joined the faculty full time in January after teaching part time since 2016. Dr. Henderson teaches gross anatomy and the core pediatrics curriculum, and her research interests include early interventions to promote the cognitive, language, and motor development of infants and toddlers with disabilities.

Dr. David Smelser, PT, DPT, OCS joined the faculty in August. Dr. Smelser assists with teaching several courses in the musculoskeletal series, as well as assisting with clinical education placements. He has a passion for education of both patients and clinicians, and was inspired to pursue teaching full-time to “show future clinicians what healthcare can and should be.”
PT School in the Time of COVID: DPT Students Transition to Virtual Learning

Since the transition to online and hybrid learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, PT school has been anything but typical for the current cohorts of DPT students!

Learning a whole new set of time management skills was critical as the students rapidly pivoted to fully online learning in March, and then returned to campus part-time this August. Christine Waite, president of Sigma Pi Tau, said that time management was one of the biggest challenges she and her classmates faced. While the flexibility of online and hybrid learning is enjoyable, she notes that “the pacing of the courses can be challenging without the limits of class times on the professors.”

DPT class of 2023 president, Azra Cubro, agrees that building her own schedule has been a big challenge, and has adopted the habit of making a to-do list every day to help keep her learning on track.

“It’s really satisfying being able to see the progress as I cross out completed tasks,” she said.

Too much screen time and not enough time with their classmates are other commonly cited challenges. Though everyone agrees that the fall semester’s hybrid approach combining online learning with smaller, in-person labs is better than being fully online.

“We still miss the other half of our classmates” said Waite.

Once the pandemic is over, are the students looking forward to returning to campus full time? Yes and no! “I personally am a big fan of hybrid learning,” said Cubro. “I feel like we are in a sense spoiled by being able to slow down lectures and view them literally a million times if we wanted to. Overall, I feel like my life is much more structured and disciplined!”

Waite said that the class of 2022 is split with some students preferring hybrid learning and others anxious to return to campus full time. Everyone agrees, however, that no matter what form their classes take they just want to stay on track to get their degree!

With COVID-19 continuing to introduce a sense of uncertainty as to what the rest of their PT school experience will look like, one thing is for certain: Georgia State DPT students have proven that they can rise to these new challenges and will surely continue to do so moving forward!

Dr. Anne Lorio Investigates Virtual Learning During the Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed Georgia State’s campus in March of 2020, Dr. Anne Lorio, PT, DPT, NCS, clinical associate professor, was immediately interested in how the sudden pivot to virtual learning would affect our DPT students.

She submitted a proposal to the IRB and received approval soon after the campus closure. A 23-item survey was sent to all 3 cohorts of students.

“The intent of the survey and study was to really find out from students what worked best for learning during this very challenging time,” said Dr. Lorio. “With potential for some component of online instruction in the future, it is imperative that we connect and listen to their needs more than ever.”

In addition to the survey results, Dr. Lorio is looking at differences in exam performance “pre” (before campus closure) to “post” (after the switch to online instruction). Her preliminary findings were presented at Georgia State’s research seminar series on June 24. She is also planning to present her data at the APTA Academy of Education’s Education Leadership Conference in October 2020, and is in the process of publishing a manuscript based on her findings.

“With potential for some component of online instruction in the future, it is imperative that we connect and listen to their needs more than ever.”

-Dr. Anne Lorio, PT, DPT, NCS
You Are Always One of Us

We thank Dr. Deon Thompson for her service to our Department for over 25 years until she retired in June 2020. Although as a family we are saddened to see her leave us, we are all truly proud of her achievements over the years. She has received high praise about her expertise as an anatomy professor from both present and past students. Dr. Thompson is the professor who truly looks out and speaks for her students. In our department meetings we have often been reminded by her to put ourselves in our student’s situation especially when they are going through a difficult time.

We thank Dr. Andrew Butler who served as our interim department chair and associate dean for research in our college. Dr. Butler led our department for over six years through several transitions and set the department up for success. Dr. Butler now serves as the dean of the College of Health Professions at the University of Alabama-Birmingham.

Dr. Thompson and Dr. Butler, you will always be one of us, and part of the Georgia State PT family.

Alumni Mark 100th and Final Interview on the Fresh PT Podcast

Earlier this year, GSU PT Alumni Network President Dr. Debbie Popielarcyzk sat down to interview Dr. Matt Hodgens, one of the two Georgia State DPT alumni who created the Fresh PT podcast. He credits his co-host, Dr. Andrew Kneeburg with coming up with the idea for their podcast, which focuses on helping DPT students and new grads bridge the gap between entry level and next level practice.

“We initially had our mentors on and bigger names in the profession, but we got the greatest reach with having other young therapists on our show.”

Dr. Hodgens shared that each of their podcast guests has been an inspiration to him. “That feeling you get of going to a conference or being around other passionate therapists, that’s what we get every time we have someone on,” he said.

“We wanted to share some wisdom while also giving practical advice on the transition from student to therapist as it was happening for us,” said Dr. Hodgens. When asked what piece of advice he would most like to share with other alumni with respect to new graduates, Dr. Hodgens encouraged them to help out the new grads whenever possible.

“Once you’ve made it, help the next wave get there,” he said. Recognizing that recent graduates are often struggling to balance a new career with family and personal time, he encouraged more seasoned therapists to help support them through their transition.

“The biggest help is knowing that what they’re going through is normal and don’t go it alone.”

Check out the Fresh PT Podcast for more great tips from Dr. Hodgens and Dr. Kneeburg about how to take your new practice to the next level!
Spotlight on Faculty and Student Research

- Distinguished University Professor Dr. Gordon Warren reached a phenomenal milestone this year, publishing his 100th peer-reviewed manuscript, “Male mice with elevated C-type natriuretic peptide-dependent guanylyl cyclase-B activity have increased osteoblasts, bone mass and bone strength” in the journal Bone. Congratulations on your accomplishment, Dr. Warren!

- Dr. Yu-Ping Chen, associate professor, along with colleagues in Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology, has been awarded a five-year $1.25 million interdisciplinary grant by the Department of Education. The project, entitled “Interdisciplinary Personnel Preparation for Early Speech, Physical, and Occupational Therapy Services (Early SPOTS)” will help ensure that an interdisciplinary group of fully credentialed occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech-language pathologists have the necessary skills and knowledge that derive from evidence-based practice to be successful in serving high-needs infants and youth with significant disabilities and their families.

- Dr. Kimberly Morelli, clinical associate professor and program director, received the 2020 Teaching Excellence Award from the Lewis College. The award will let her improve student learning experiences by adding virtual reality technology in the gross anatomy and functional anatomy courses.


- Dr. Gena Henderson, clinical assistant professor, published an article titled “Neuromuscular response to a single session of whole-body vibration in children with cerebral palsy: A pilot study” in Clinical Biomechanics.

- Dr. Anne Lorio, clinical associate professor, has several upcoming conference presentations. Dr. Lorio will be present two-hour educational sessions on the results of her virtual learning survey at the APTA Academy of Education’s Education Leadership Conference in October of 2020, as well as sessions on professional presentations and the ethics of end of life decision making, with Clinical Assistant Professor Dr. Jane Gore, at the APTA’s Combined Sections Meeting in February of 2021.

- Dr. Jake Irwin, clinical assistant professor, will be presenting two poster’s at the APTA Georgia’s ImPact conference in October, including one poster, “Blood Flow Restriction Training for Enhancing Knee Extensor Strength in Individuals with Knee Osteoarthritis: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis” with recent DPT graduates Eric Summerford, PT, DPT and Christina Dehike, PT, DPT. Dr. Irwin, who currently serves as an APTA Delegate, has also been nominated to serve on the APTA’s Nominating Committee.

Don’t forget that October is National Physical Therapy Month!
Take some time this month to visit www.choosePT.com, a resource provided by the American Physical Therapy Association, to learn about ways that you can promote our profession and encourage your patients to #ChoosePT!
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