

PhD in Physical Therapy in USA - A Dream Come True By Hardwork And Planning

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Hello dear friends! It has been 2 years since I wrote my last article on how my PhD journey was conceived and the whole process through which I made it to the esteemed institute that is my second family now. Thank you so much for your overwhelming response and the mails that I got with enquiries regarding PhD programs and the decisions concerned with them. With this article, I would love to share what I got to learn about the process of PhD, what to expect and what to be prepared for. I have been asked several questions through mails so I have a better idea about the kind of thoughts that go through a PhD aspirant's mind hence I decided to include the answers to all those questions as a part of my article today. One of the very common questions I get asked is if the Doctorate degree in physical therapy (DPT) is same as PhD. The DPT degree is a purely clinical degree which involves exposing the students to the different health conditions which might need physical therapy as a part of their rehabilitation. The DPT students are taught the various techniques of transfers, treatment etc as a part of their curriculum. On the other hand, PhD includes research in a lab setting, developing your own questions and you have coursework along with your lab work. This course work is different for every individual as you will have different fields of specialization. Depending upon the kind of work happening in your lab, you will be expected to take courses that will broaden your horizon regarding that particular field of specialization. Every DPT student has the same coursework and same exam pattern and grades are important in DPT. For a student pursuing PhD, more than grades what matters is the kind of work that they are doing in their lab as this is going to reflect in their resume and their future marketability. The lab work translates into poster presentations, paper presentations, and paper publications etc. which further add to the resume. These are the important milestones in a PhD student's life. Grades have to be enough to maintain a GPA of 3 as to ensure continuity of your funding. The DPT students have no funding and they have to pay the whole tuition fee amount on their own. PhD is always with funding (either through Teaching assistantship or Research assistantship) so you do not have to worry about your tuition fees and the living expenses. Another question that I get asked is if Master's degree is necessary to get into the PhD program. The beauty of the PhD programs in US is you can get into the PhD program even after your BPT. The Master's degree is not mandatory but it does help in developing good writing skills faster as you would have had your thesis experience already. I have seen many friends who came into the PhD program after their BPT but found it too challenging and left it midway for a Master's program. Leaving a course midway is a personal decision; but remember it was a chance you had got through competition and you would be wasting it if you left without completing it. I have also known friends who have come after BPT, slogged it out and made sure they graduated from their PhD program with glowing reviews and great publications. It therefore depends upon what are you ready to give to the program and how much of hard work are you ready to put in. Many professors in our university mentioned it to me that potential PhD students who apply to our university, tend to apply to multiple faculties in the same dept. When these faculties meet during their weekly/monthly meetings and discuss updates, they find it weird that the same student has applied to multiple faculties who have completely different field of expertise. This takes away the credibility of the potential student and as a result none of the faculties show any interest in this student. It would therefore be good to remember that the faculties talk amid themselves and it is not at all a good idea to apply to multiple faculties at the same time in the same dept. of the same university. It also makes sense to apply to one faculty at a time (whose research interest and work is on the same lines as you) and think of any other faculty only after you have received a confirmed NO from the faculty you were pursuing. This way you keep your slate clean and your credibility intact. Many PhD students tend to get relaxed once they get into the University of their choice. Getting into the PhD program is just reaching the starting point of your goal and not completion of the goal itself. Although, after all the hard work that goes into getting accepted into the PhD program, students tend to feel like they can now breathe easy and relax! This is, however, not the case. Even though a 4 to 5 years PhD

program might seem long enough to get all work done, time flies once you get started. The new culture, the paperwork related to your admission and setting up of your university account, you getting used to campus, the workload, the class registration etc. takes up precious time. Not to forget there would a lot to learn in the classes that you would be taking as well as the lab where you would be working with your mentor and lab mates. Also, if you take longer to get things done in the beginning, the rest of the learning processes that follow will be delayed too. This will in turn delay your PhD process as a whole leading you to either end up with a PhD longer than the said 4 to 5 years or you will graduate in a hurry without having gained the best from your PhD experience. The best way to approach your PhD is with enthusiasm and perseverance. Keep yourself organized and be ready to meet your deadlines without going crazy at the last minute. Make sure you get into research that gets you excited. When you love what you are doing, time flies! And you will be done with your PhD before you know it. In addition to teaching you about science and research, PhD also helps you know yourself better. It pushes you to your limits at times, teaches you better time and stress management, helps you be a better team player, makes you an expert multi-tasking machine, hones your presentation skills and really builds up your patience level. Good luck to all the potential PhD students out there! You all can feel free to email me if you have queries that you need answers to regarding PhD related to PT. Thank you! Author: Sahana kamath Pai, PhD Student- Rehabilitation Science Doctoral Program, University of Florida Can be reached through email- sahana41@gmail.com