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# FCCPT Update

## What is the First Professional Degree in Physical Therapy in the U.S.?

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### It's Not a Bachelor's Degree

To start an article with a list of negatives is against all rules of writing, but we know what the first professional physical therapy degree is not. As of January 1, 2003 the first professional physical therapy degree is *not* a bachelor's degree.

When the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) decided to no longer accept a bachelor's degree as the first professional physical therapy degree on January 1, 2003, it did not designate a new physical therapy degree requirement nor did it change the criteria for physical therapy educational content. But still, the entry-level or first professional physical therapy degree is now a post-baccalaureate degree.

### What is Considered Post-Baccalaureate?

There is however, no single definition for "post-baccalaureate." The degree may be an MPT (masters in physical therapy), MSPT (masters of science in physical therapy), or DPT (the clinical doctorate in physical therapy). The minimum length of any of these programs is five years or what is called a 2+3 program. This 2+3 program includes two years of general education and prerequisites followed by three years of professional coursework and clinical experience.

The current minimum requirements of the FSBPT Coursework Evaluation Tool, which is used to determine equivalency of foreign graduates' physical therapy education, remain the same; 54 credits of general education, 69-70 of professional credits and at least 800 hours of clinical education. These minimum hours do not exist in any one program, but across physical therapy schools. The programs reporting the minimum numbers all indicate their intention to increase these requirements over the next five years. Because of this, the Foreign Credentialing Commission on Physical Therapy (FCCPT) will continue to monitor changes and recommend updates to the FSBPT Coursework Evaluation Tool. As the 2+3 programs phase out, the recommendations will follow.

### CAPTE Standards

CAPTE reviews the minimal evaluative criteria for U.S. physical therapy education on a regular schedule, (about every 7-10 years), similar to the way FSBPT reviews the practice analysis for entry-level physical therapists. In the early

years of physical therapy, these reviews did not result in frequent changes. The first criteria were published by the AMA in 1955; the next change occurred in 1978; these standards were set by APTA. CAPTE was established and adopted new standards that were effective in 1992. The current criteria were adopted in 1996 and new criteria will roll out in 2006.

The new criteria will be in place in 2006 and programs accredited after January 2006 will need to meet the new criteria. Programs previously accredited will have until their next re-accreditation visit to fully implement the changes.

FSBPT is currently in the process of developing tools to reflect the earlier criteria to be used for candidates who require a review of educational equivalence at the time of their graduation.

### Post-Professional Degrees

Post-professional physical therapy degrees are not accredited. Thus individuals who complete an advanced master's, PhD, or D.Sci degrees in physical therapy as well as transitional degree such as T-MPT or T-DPT are not graduates of CAPTE accredited programs. CAPTE clarified this for those programs with the recommendation that programs should not use the degree designations for these post-professional degrees. Jurisdictions should be aware that there were some overlaps of degree prior to 1994. Thus it is important to request documentation of all higher education.

As of June 2003, the APTA listed the following posts-professional degrees for physical therapists: these include Masters, MS and t-MPT, doctoral (PhD and t-DPT or D.Sci), graduate certificates and clinical residency programs. While these are not first professional degrees, foreign educated physical therapists (FEPTs) may find supplemental coursework within these programs. The transitional program curriculums are designed to augment the BS education to cover current content criteria for earlier U.S. graduates and thus may do the same for FEPTs.

FEPTs should be advised, however, that completion of a transitional degree may not provide all of the basic education criteria for equivalency. The FEPT should undergo an equivalency evaluation prior to enrollment to be sure that they have completed all entry-level work.

Many, but not all, post-professional programs require U.S. licensure or eligibility for licensure, thus in most cases, the FEPT has the credentials review to work with.

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