

= CHAPTER 19 =

Student
Involvement in
the American

Physical Therapy Association

American Physical Therapy Association

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is an organization of more than 85,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students. The APTA offers several categories of membership for students in physical therapist or physical therapist assistant education programs.¹ Student membership is offered at a fraction of the active membership costs, making it one of the best deals in your career.

For Students in Physical Therapist and Physical Therapist Assistant Programs

Student membership requires enrollment in a physical therapy education program that is accredited or is seeking or granted candidacy status by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education. *Student physical therapist membership* requires enrollment in a physical therapist assistant education program that is accredited or is seeking or granted candidacy status.

For Physical Therapists

Physical therapist membership is offered to physical therapists who have graduated from physical therapy education programs that have met approval standards defined by the Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy

Education. Membership is also open to physical therapists from other countries who submit a credentials evaluation or a license from a US jurisdiction that requires a credentials evaluation prior to licensure.²

For Physical Therapist Assistants

Physical therapist assistant membership is offered to physical therapist assistants who have graduated from a Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education-accredited physical therapist assistant education program (the program must be accredited at time of graduation).

Thirty states have *Physical Therapist Assistant Special Interest Groups* in existence.³ These serve as a means of facilitating camaraderie and communication among physical therapist assistants at the local and state level.

The *Physical Therapist Assistant Caucus* represents the physical therapist

assistants' interests, needs, and issues in APTA governance. The Physical Therapist Assistant Caucus meets each year before the APTA's House of Delegates and at various times throughout the year to establish and work towards its goals. The Physical Therapist Assistant Caucus includes 51 physical therapist assistant jurisdictional representatives—one from each chapter. Five delegates are elected from this body to represent the Caucus and all physical therapist assistant members at the annual APTA House of Delegates meeting.⁴

For more information about the Physical Therapist Assistant Caucus, visit <http://www.apta.org/PTA/Representation/FAQs/>.

All membership categories require members to sign a pledge to be guided by the Code of Ethics of the APTA.

APTA Career Starter Dues Program

At the encouragement of his program director, Jeremy joined the APTA as a student physical therapist assistant member in December of the first year of the physical therapist assistant program. He renewed his membership the following December as he finished classes and looked forward to his final semester of clinical internships. After graduation, Jeremy received a membership renewal invoice for one-half of the usual membership rate. One year later, Jeremy received his annual renewal invoice for the full membership rate.

The Career Starter Dues Program⁵ is a helpful plan to assist students with the financial burden of membership

upon entering the profession. Students who were APTA members at graduation are able to renew their membership within 6 months following the expiration of their student membership at a discount of 50%.

The discounted Career Starter Rate Program ensures that new graduates will have the continued support of the APTA, as well as access to valuable news and information, while establishing themselves in their careers.

Benefits of APTA Membership

APTA membership is one of the best investments that students can make in their future. Through APTA publications and student programs, you will have access to the latest developments in the profession, sources of financial aid, and building networks for fu-

ture employment and professional activities.⁶

Information on New Developments and Research

- APTA monthly publications include *Physical Therapy* and *PT in Motion*. These 2 publications include articles and information on the latest events in the profession, conference announcements, the latest research, and current professional issues.
- The APTA website (<http://www.apta.org>) and the Student Assembly web page (<http://www.apta.org/StudentAssembly>) are valuable sources for information that students can use for everything from class projects to future job searches.

- *The Pulse*, a monthly online publication, is a news bulletin containing articles and information written by students from across the country (<http://www.apta.org/CurrentStudents/News>).
- *Open Door*, is a benefit for APTA members that offers full-text articles from health care journals and magazines.
- *The Guide to Physical Therapist Practice* identifies common features of patient/client management by physical therapists for selected patient/client diagnostic groups.
- *Hooked on Evidence*⁷ includes extractions of articles related to physical therapy interventions that have been entered into a database by volunteers (<http://www.hookedonevidence.com>).

Financial Aid for Students

There are several scholarship, loan programs, and competitive financial awards available for students in physical therapist and physical therapist assistant programs, as well as physical therapists who are enrolled in graduate programs. Specific research-related funding is available through the Foundation for Physical Therapy.⁸ More information is available on the APTA website at <http://www.apta.org/CurrentStudents/ScholarshipsAwards>.

Scholarships and awards may also be available through your state chapter of the APTA. To search for your state chapter visit <http://www.apta.org/chapters>. Membership in your professional association may also make you a more viable candidate for the scholarships and student awards offered by your college or community.

Mentors and Networking

The APTA is the gateway for developing collegial networking through chapter and district meetings, national conferences, and the National Student Conclave, an annual meeting for students of physical therapy. Membership gives you access to policymakers, researchers, expert clinicians, and leaders in the field. Check out the APTA Peer Support website to see how to find a mentor.⁹ Developing a relationship with a role model or an experienced clinician can help to guide your career development and will inevitably serve you well.

Areas of Clinical Focus

Within the APTA structure, there are 18 specialty groups called “sections” that focus on particular areas of phys-

ical therapy practice, such as pediatrics, acute care, or geriatrics. Involvement in a section gives you access to specialized publications, directories of other members with similar interests, and opportunities to learn about new state-of-the-art trends and ways to develop your expertise after graduation.

Professional Books and Conference Discounts

APTA membership also entitles members to discounted rates on all APTA publications and conferences. Special member prices also apply to T-shirts, promotional items, and public relations materials about the physical therapy profession. Further, students who volunteer for a few hours to help during state and national conferences can often attend at a markedly reduced rate.

Insurance Plans

Most clinical facilities and academic programs require that students enroll in a malpractice insurance program prior to beginning the clinical education portion of the curriculum. APTA-affiliated malpractice plans offer professional liability insurance to students at a low cost. In addition, the APTA has negotiated reasonable rates on many other forms of auto, home, and life insurance.

Leadership Skills

Students can actively participate in district, state, and national chapter activities through student special interest groups (SSIGs), the Student Assembly, and the National Student Conclave. These valuable learning opportunities offer critical insights into professional

organizational and governance processes. There are scholarship programs available for internships in Government Affairs as well. These experiences develop leadership skills for future career opportunities.

Land That Position

The APTA Career Center sponsors *Red Hot Jobs* (<http://www.apta.org/jobs>), a website that offers job vacancies and virtual career fairs, as well as offering a Career Center at the annual conference and the Combined Sections Meeting. In addition to job vacancy announcements, the Center offers guidance on resume writing and interviewing skills. Employers and recruiters often exhibit at these meetings and at the National Student Conclave.

APTA membership should be listed on your resume. APTA membership and voluntary student activity in the profession reflects a commitment that is rec-

ognized by employers and professionals across the country. It indicates that you are in touch with the latest educational and research information. As a member of the APTA, you will have pledged to uphold the *Standards of Ethical Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant*. This holds you to a higher standard of behavior, which is well respected by employers and colleagues alike!

Student Leadership and Involvement

The following suggestions are some of the many ways that students can get involved in activities that promote the profession of physical therapy.

On-Campus Organizations

Serve in the leadership of an on-campus organization that promotes

physical therapy education or awareness. Established physical therapy student organizations can usually receive financial support from student organization funds. Such groups sponsor physical therapy awareness and disability awareness events, fundraising, and lecture series and serve as a valuable resource for the campus community.

Fund-Raising Activities

Work on a fund-raising event. There are many potential fund-raising projects that directly support student interests in the physical therapy profession. Campus organizations that support physical therapy students, political action committees, and foundations for research are all in need of support.

Campus and District/ State APTA Activities

Every campus has funds and mechanisms for donations for student scholarships or resources to support student attendance at professional conferences and other activities. Students can become actively involved in raising funds to support their activities as students. Students may also become involved in district- and state-wide APTA fund-raising efforts for particular initiatives and organizations.

Political Action

Public policy and state and federal legislation play a major role in the future of the physical therapy profession. Political action committees (eg, PT-PAC; <http://www.ptpac.org/>) are critical to ensure that legislators are well-

has been historically held in conjunction with the annual conference in June each year. Students can see organizational governance in action on the floor of the House of Delegates. The APTA Student Assembly also elects 2 student members who attend the House of Delegates as nonvoting participants.

Volunteer at State and National Conferences

Attending a conference is one of the best ways to see and hear the latest information, meet other students and potential employers, and develop a collegial network. Student members often receive discounted registration rates. Students who volunteer may receive additional benefits. Call well in advance of the conference to offer your services.

Join the APTA Student Assembly

The *APTA Student Assembly* was formed in 1991 to address the needs of student members. There are now more than 20,000 physical therapist student members and physical therapist assistant student members of the APTA Student Assembly.¹⁰ Students share similar needs and interests in answering the challenges, issues, and pressures placed on them by their learning environment. Students share challenges such as financial and time constraints, school pressures, and concerns about future employment. The Student Assembly includes both physical therapist student members and physical therapist assistant student members and provides a strong base of support for future professional development.

The Student Assembly serves several functions in providing information for Assembly members, such as promot-

ing the role of students in the physical therapy profession, encouraging student membership, and representing the interests of the Student Assembly members to APTA leadership and components. The Student Assembly sends both a physical therapist student delegate and physical therapist assistant student delegate to the APTA House of Delegates, which is the policy-making body of the physical therapy profession. Although they cannot vote, they can enter motions and represent the student assembly on important issues.

There are many leadership opportunities for APTA student members on the Student Assembly Board of Directors. A new slate of candidates is nominated and elected annually. Interested candidates can contact the Nominating Committee.

Join or Start a Student Special Interest Group

Student special interest groups (SSIG) are groups of student and student affiliate members who are organized on a *state-wide* basis in conjunction with *APTA state chapters*. SSIGs promote membership in the APTA and represent the interests of SSIG members to the APTA state chapter leadership. SSIGs frequently communicate by newsletters and organize meetings, educational sessions, and social events in conjunction with chapter conferences.

There are leadership opportunities to serve as officers of SSIGs as well. There are 22 APTA chapters with SSIGs. A list of the states and the steps to form a SSIG are outlined on the APTA website.[11](#)

APTA National Student Conclave

The National Student Conclave is an annual weekend conference sponsored by the APTA and designed to support students, expose them to advances in the field, and introduce them to the APTA governance process. It is a tremendous networking and educational opportunity that should not be missed.

Students attend educational sessions regarding career strategies, interviewing skills, legislative initiatives, and clinical sessions in areas such as orthopedics, home health, and sports physical therapy. There is an exhibition area and many employers recruit students at this event. Students also learn about the APTA governance process and parliamentary procedure. In addition, social events top off the conference ac-

tivities with talent shows and receptions.

This annual meeting occurs in the fall (usually October), and all student members are invited to attend. A typical program format is shown in [Table 19-1](#).¹²

Student Awards

There are several awards that recognize outstanding students in the physical therapy profession. Information about these awards and nomination forms are available through the APTA website (<http://www.apta.org>). In addition, many state chapters reward students with scholarships as well. Be sure to ask your program faculty and/or look at your chapter's website for more information. Is there someone deserving of recognition in your educational program?

- Scholarships and Grants

- ◇ Federal/state scholarship resources
- ◇ Private scholarship resources
- ◇ Mary McMillan Scholarship award
- ◇ Minority scholarship award
- ◇ Minority scholarship websites
- ◇ Minority grants
- APTA Awards
 - ◇ Outstanding PT Student and PTA Student Awards
 - ◇ SPT Minority Scholarship Award for Academic Excellence
 - ◇ SPTA Minority Scholarship Award for Academic Excellence
 - ◇ Section awards
 - ◇ Neurology section student research awards
 - ◇ Orthopedic section Outstanding PT/PTA Student Award
 - ◇ Pediatrics section thesis and dissertation Awards

informed about the physical therapy profession. Support of political action groups ensures that the physical therapy profession will have a strong voice in the state and federal legislative processes.

Physical Therapy Research

The Miami-Marquette Challenge is an annual fund-raising competition between physical therapy and physical therapist assistant academic programs that raises funds for the Foundation for Physical Therapy. These funds are used to support physical therapy research. There may be similar organizations in your state or local community as well.

Observe the APTA House of Delegates

Students may observe the annual APTA House of Delegates. This session

- Customized learning: Choose the sessions that you want to attend throughout the weekend, including a concurrent track for PTAs.
- Networking: Meet hundreds of students who share your interests and are dedicated to the profession.
- Dress code: Attire for the NSC is business casual. Be comfortable, but be professional.

ATTENDING THE NSC PROVIDES YOU WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND THE FOLLOWING EVENTS:

- Special-interest seminars covering topics including acute care, clinical electrophysiology and wound management, geriatrics, neurology, orthopedics, pediatrics, sports physical therapy, and women's health.
- Develop a framework for exploring career pathways and learn some of the core essentials required to pursue these options. Take advantage of opportunities to explore career paths and

the initial steps in identifying your preferred pathway as a new graduate entering the profession.

- Workshops on resume writing and interviewing skills.
- An open discussion with APTA's president, where you'll find out what is ahead for the profession.
- An exhibit hall that features employers, manufacturers, and publishers who are eager to speak with you.
- Network with colleagues, mentors, and other members of the profession at special events.

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Summary

Student membership in the APTA offers many benefits, including access to the latest research and health policy

developments in the field, connections to mentoring networks, opportunities to learn about specific clinical areas of interest through section membership, discounts on conference registration, APTA publications, and group insurance programs. Numerous opportunities exist for students to organize on-campus activities and take leadership roles in the APTA through the Student Assembly and SSIGs.

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PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. When and where is the next Student Conclave? How many students from your program have attended in the past few years? Will any attend this year?

2. Access the Student Assembly website at <http://www.apta.org/StudentAssembly/>. Is there a Student Special Interest Group in your state? List the contact person below.

3. Does your program participate in fundraising for the Miami-Marquette Challenge? Generate several fund-raising ideas and write them here. How can you initiate and/or add to the efforts of fundraising for the Foundation for Physical Therapy?

4. Check the Scholarship and Awards Web page at <http://www.apta.org/CurrentStudents/ScholarshipsAwards/>. Is there

a student in your program who would qualify for a student award?

List the requirements and application/nomination deadline below.



◇ Performing Arts Special
Interest Group (PASIG) Student
Scholarship

TABLE 19-1

**2013 NATIONAL STUDENT
CONCLAVE¹²**

HOW WILL I BENEFIT?

- Network with peers, mentors, employers, manufacturers, publishers, and APTA leaders.
- Learn practical information not typically covered in the classroom.
- Discover your role as a member of APTA and how you can make the most of your membership and make a difference!
- Meet and elect the future leaders of the Student Assembly.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?