1. What is the NPTE?

The National Physical Therapy Examination, commonly referred to as the NPTE, is the licensing examination that graduates of accredited physical therapy programs must pass to become licensed physical therapists in the United States.

The NPTE is administered by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy and is designed to assess whether candidates demonstrate the entry-level knowledge required for safe and effective physical therapy practice.

2. Why are NPTE pass rates important?

NPTE pass rates are one indicator of how effectively a physical therapy program prepares students for entry-level practice and licensure. Strong pass rates help demonstrate that graduates are prepared to meet professional standards and enter the workforce.

However, NPTE pass rates should be interpreted alongside other program outcomes, including graduation rates, employment rates, clinical performance, student support systems, admissions trends, curriculum design, and student progression data.

3. What does “first-time pass rate” mean?

The first-time pass rate refers to the percentage of graduates who pass the NPTE on their first attempt.

4. What does “ultimate pass rate” mean?

The ultimate pass rate refers to the percentage of graduates who pass the NPTE after all attempts within the reporting period. This measure reflects whether graduates ultimately achieve licensure eligibility, even if they do not pass on the first attempt.

5. Why is the program’s NPTE pass rate currently low?

The program attributes the current low pass rate to several factors including:

- Program culture previously minimized opportunities for explicit NPTE test preparation among students
- Inadequate opportunities for students to practice NPTE-style questions both in rigor and format.
- Inadequate opportunities for test strategy preparation among students
- Lack of programmatic checkpoints in place to ensure student readiness for NPTE examination
- Curriculum content in musculoskeletal and neuromuscular content areas required expansion

The program uses available data to identify patterns rather than attributing outcomes to any single cause.

6. Is the program still accredited?

Yes. The CUAA DPT Program remains accredited by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). The program is committed to meeting accreditation standards and continuously improving student outcomes. The program is also communicating with appropriate institutional and accrediting stakeholders as required.

7. What is the program doing to address low NPTE pass rates?

The program has taken the following steps to improve future pass rates.

- NPTE preparation is now integrated throughout the curriculum early, often, and routinely. This has been accomplished through several initiatives, including having all core faculty trained in NPTE-style item-writing and all system-based courses including opportunities for students to practice and understand NPTE-style questions.
- Beginning in Fall 2027, the program plans to offer an NPTE prep course for all students currently enrolled in the program. This course will include full access to an external NPTE preparation vendor for each student.
- Improved opportunities for students to take and learn from practice exams. Each student now has the opportunity to take four, validated practice exams prior to graduation. Additionally, each student will participate in written, comprehensives exams at the ends of Semester 1,2, 5, and 6 to address testing rigor, endurance and content throughout the curriculum
- The program has implemented several steps to optimize student readiness for the NPTE exam. Some of these initiatives include a detailed coaching plan to address identified knowledge gaps and testing challenges for each student, expected minimum scores on periodic comprehensive written exams to track student progress closely, and ensuring graduation requirements are aligned with best practice for NPTE readiness.
- Curricular adjustments have been made to expand musculoskeletal and neurologic content areas. Musculoskeletal course increased from four to five and from 30 to 40 weeks; neurologic content increased from two to four courses and from 14 to 32 weeks. These changes do not change the established tuition rates for current students.
- The program remains committed to transparency with its prospective, current and past students related to current and future state of pass rates and its impact on the program itself.
- Implementation of tutoring services and peer mentoring groups to continue to support students in readiness

8. How will current students be supported?

Current students will receive support through the initiatives previously described. Students who have already graduated continue to be supported through tutoring services both individual and in groups and financial support to assist them with additional preparation activities.

Students who are concerned about their readiness should contact Dr. Susannah Steele or Dr. Melissa Kieffer for further guidance.

9. Do low NPTE pass rates mean students are not clinically prepared?

NPTE pass rates are one important indicator, but they do not fully represent clinical performance. The program has a strong history of students performing well in clinical education experiences.

10. What role do students have in improving NPTE outcomes?

The program is committed to providing students every opportunity to be successfully on the NPTE. Ultimately, responsibility rests with the student. Students are expected to:

- Engage consistently in coursework and review activities
- Use feedback from faculty and practice assessments
- Follow individualized academic success plans when assigned
- Seek assistance early when they are struggling
- Participate in recommended or required NPTE preparation activities
- Develop and maintain a structured study plan
- Practice retrieval, application, and clinical reasoning rather than relying only on passive review
- Take advantage of academic, wellness, and accessibility resources as needed

11. Will low NPTE pass rates affect prospective students?

Prospective students are encouraged to review program outcomes carefully for all programs in which they are interested in attending. The program is committed to transparency and will provide accurate information about outcomes, support systems, curriculum improvements, and student success initiatives.

Prospective students are encouraged to contact Dr. Susannah Steele or Dr. Melissa Kieffer with questions about NPTE preparation, student support, graduation outcomes, and licensure preparation.

12. Should current students be worried about the program's pass rates?

It is understandable that students may feel concerned. The program takes NPTE outcomes seriously and is actively implementing improvement strategies. Current students should view this as an opportunity to engage early with available resources, monitor their own readiness, and work closely with faculty advisors.

Students with concerns should schedule a meeting with their academic coach to review their academic progress and develop a preparation plan.

13. What should graduates do if they did not pass the NPTE?

For graduates who do not pass the NPTE, we recommend the following steps:

- Reviewing the NPTE performance feedback report
- Identifying content areas needing improvement
- Creating a structured remediation and study plan
- Use a reputable NPTE preparation resource
- Scheduling regular check-ins with a faculty advisor or designated support person
- Addressing test anxiety, wellness, or time-management concerns
- Establishing a timeline for retaking the examination

We are here to support you on this journey. We strongly encourage any graduates with questions about their NPTE performance to reach out to us. The program's commitment is to support all graduates through successful licensure.

14. How will the program measure whether improvement efforts are working?

The program will monitor progress using multiple indicators, including:

- Course performance trends
- Student progression and retention data
- Comprehensive exam results
- Practice NPTE scores
- First-time and ultimate NPTE pass rates
- Graduation rates

- Employment outcomes
- Student and graduate feedback
- Faculty review of curricular and assessment changes

The program reviews this data on an established schedule so changes can be thoughtful, collaborative, and positively impactful.

15. Who can students, graduates, or stakeholders contact with questions?

Questions may be directed to:

Program Director: Dr. Susannah L. Steele, susannah.steele@cuaa.edu; 734-995-7472
Admissions Contact: Dr. Melissa Kieffer, melissa.kieffer@cuaa.edu; 734-995-7466

The CUAA DPT Program is committed to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. While recent NPTE pass rates are a serious concern, the program is taking systematic action to strengthen student preparation, support graduates, and improve outcomes. We remain focused on preparing competent, ethical, and practice-ready physical therapists.