

Olympic College Physical Therapist Assistant graduates find success in Kitsap County and beyond

Physical therapy is a hot field right now. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Physical Therapist Assistant field will grow by 31 percent from 2016-2026, much faster than the average for all occupations, which is 7 percent. That translates to 27,500 new jobs nationwide.

The reason for this growth is attributed to an aging population of baby boomers who are staying active later in life. Many baby boomers are also entering an age where medical conditions such as heart attacks, strokes and mobility-related injuries are more prevalent, increasing the demand for physical therapy.

Those interested in pursuing a career in physical therapy have few options.

One option is to earn a doctorate, which can take up to seven years or more, while accruing significant debt. Often times, community college students are place-bound due to family and work commitments, making long-term programs like this unattainable.

Another option is a career as a physical therapist assistant. Physical therapist assistants entering the profession need an associate degree from an accredited program. Outside of Olympic College, the nearest Physical Therapist Assistant program is at Green River College in Auburn.

According to program director and lead professor, Lynn Bartlett, the Physical Therapist Assistant program is a perfect fit for community colleges like OC due to its affordability and comparatively limited time needed to complete the program.

"Part of what motivates me to come to work every day is witnessing the transformation that takes place in our students," Lynn says. "We see how this program impacts people in our community. It's the single parent, displaced workers, and veterans who come in and want to be in health care, but don't have the financial means to do a doctoral program. I love that our program positively impacts students that need a place to land. We have some great success stories of students who have turned their lives around."

Students at Olympic College can complete the program in two years at an average annual tuition of \$3,200. Physical Therapist Assistants enter the field at an average annual income of \$57,000, making this program a fantastic value.

Admission can be competitive, but the majority of applicants who complete the pre-requisites are admitted. Prerequisites for the program can generally be completed in as little as two quarters.

In addition to benefitting from outstanding graduation and employment rates, students study in the College Instruction Center, a brand new facility that opened in winter 2018.

Kristen Kirking is a second-year Physical Therapist Assistant student who discovered the field while rehabbing college-soccer injuries.

"I was amazed at the connections I was able to make with my therapist and how dedicated they were to my recovery," she said. "The ability to help people recover and gain back their lives, families, careers and hobbies inspired me to pursue this field."



Physical Therapist Assistant students in motion at the Bremerton Campus College Instruction Center.

Kristen is currently completing an eight-week clinical internship at an outpatient clinic in Sequim.

"I love working with my clinical instructor," said Kristen. "She is very confident in with my skills and even let me assist with patient treatment early on in my internship."

Often times, students like Kristen are hired locally after completing their internships. In fact, the program was launched in response to a need for qualified Physical Therapist Assistants at local clinics and hospitals. Students typically spend a significant portion of their second year doing clinical internships at practices such as Pacific Physical Therapy in Port Orchard. The clinic is owned by Dr. Brett Palmer, a physical therapist and chair of OC's Physical Therapist Assistant Program Advisory Board. He likens the clinical internship to an eight-week job interview.

"It's a neat opportunity for students. They get hands-on, one-on-one training that super charges their skills and ability, helping them to become job ready," he says. "There is a regional need for Physical Therapist Assistants, which gives OC graduates mobility to fill positions throughout the state."

In fact, Dr. Palmer has hired two OC graduates to work at his clinic in recent years.

To find out more about the OC Physical Therapist Assistant Associate in Applied Science, contact program director Lynn Bartlett, or attend an upcoming information session.

Upcoming Information Sessions

- Feb. 8, 11 a.m., College Instruction Center (Bldg. 7), Rm. 303
- March 11, noon, College Instruction Center (Bldg. 7), Rm. 303

Contact Information

Physical Therapist Assistant Program
College Instruction Center (Bldg. 7), Rm. 300
ocpta@olympic.edu, 360-473-2863
olympic.edu/physical-therapist-assistant

OLYMPIC COLLEGE

Physical Therapist Assistant Program

PTA's earn their *Associate of Applied Science* in as little as **2 years**, for around \$9,800.

111.5 / 118.5*

*Average credits needed to complete the PTA program.

PTA's work with patients in various settings:

- CLINIC 
- HOME CARE 
- ASSISTED LIVING 

= TYPICAL DUTIES =

- Treat patients using techniques such as massage & stretching.
- Help patients perform specific exercise as part of a care plan.
- Educate patients and family members about treatments and more.

Bright Outlook

88,300 Jobs Nationwide
31% Job Growth by 2026

ENTER THE WORKFORCE AT \$57K
per year MEDIAL SALARY

Job outlook and salary data provided by US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

ON THE COVER