PT Observation as a Volunteer
(Hours from paid positions in physical therapy settings are also welcome)

Observations are documented in the Physical Therapy Centralized Application Service (PTCAS): www.ptcas.org

We require a minimum of two PT Observations for a total of at least 40 hours and the observations must be from at least two different types of PT settings (they do not have to include both inpatient and outpatient settings; see Types of Settings below.) A facility may offer more than one type of setting. Most students have three or four PT Observations with an average of 35 hours each.

This observation is not expected to be a mentoring or shadowing experience where all your time is spent with a particular therapist. As a volunteer, you will be doing whatever the physical therapy facility requests of you to be useful. Observation hours are not intended to be a burden to physical therapists or facilities. You are expected to will learn about different aspects of physical therapy by volunteering in at least two different types PT settings.

Early during your volunteer time, ask a PT if she/he will be willing to verify the number of hours you spent in the setting. Keep a record of your hours, plus the name and email address of that PT. You will enter this information electronically into your PTCAS application. PTCAS will then email the PT to verify that the information you entered is correct.

Locating PT Observations:
To arrange PT observations, you might try the following:
• Look for physical therapy facilities on the internet (search for “Physical Therapy” in a geographic area close to you.)
• Contact a PT department and let them know you are seeking to volunteer in preparation for applying to a DPT program. For many years, PT programs have required that applicants gain physical therapy exposure; physical therapists will be familiar with your need to obtain PT observation hours.
• If you contact the PT department of a hospital, you will likely need to work through volunteer services and participate in an orientation program. Let the coordinator know that you wish to volunteer in physical therapy.

Types of PT settings (at least two of these are required):
• Acute Care Hospital
• Nursing Home/Skilled Nursing Facility/Extended Care Facility
• Other Inpatient Facility
• Rehabilitation/Sub-Acute Rehabilitation
• Free-standing PT or Hospital Clinic
• Home Health
• Industrial/Occupational Health
• Other Outpatient Facility
• School/Pre-school
• Wellness/Prevention/Fitness