The clinical education philosophy is an adjunct to and is built upon the Department of Physical Therapy's Mission, Vision and Values (http://www.health.utah.edu/pt/about/mission.html). The program prepares students as generalist physical therapists who are prepared for not only a current level of practice, but also to adapt to future changes throughout their careers. The entire curriculum prepares students to be confident independent generalist practitioners in the multifaceted roles of clinician, teacher, researcher, consultant, administrator, and life-long learner. To this end, students are encouraged to obtain a wide exposure to a variety of practice settings throughout the program.

To obtain a wide variety of exposure to various practice settings students complete four full-time internships totaling 36 weeks, in a minimum of three different (and most prevalent) settings: acute hospital-based care, neurological rehabilitation, and outpatient orthopedics. The fourth internship setting is optional, taking into consideration the student’s interests. Within the four internships, the student must also gain a broad exposure to patients in their geriatric years. To provide further exposure to various practice settings, students have the opportunity to complete part-time clinical experiences during their didactic semesters. These experiences foster concurrent academic knowledge integration into clinical skills, as well as, exposure to different practice settings or aspects of the patient care continuum.

We feel strongly that clinical education is an integral component of the physical therapy curriculum serving to not only integrate academic didactic learning into practical clinical application skills, but also to enhance and enrich didactic learning. Clinical education serves to enhance the socialization of the student to professional practice building strong professional core values. Therefore, we use an integrative approach with students completing concurrent part-time clinical experiences (one required and others optional) and full-time internships spread out throughout the curriculum (one full-time internship at the end of the 1st and 2nd academic years, and two following the completion of all didactic education).

The Program in Physical Therapy seeks to address the health care physical therapy needs for the community, state and region. To that end: (1) we place students in internships/experiences locally, throughout the state and region. Students are encouraged, but not required, to complete at least one full-time internship outside Utah; (2) the majority of our clinical sites are within Utah and neighboring states.

We believe strong relationships with our clinical sites foster optimal and successful clinical education. Good communication, on-site visits, and personal acquaintance with the facility staff/program fosters a better reciprocal understanding of the academic preparation of our students and our understanding of the facility’s programs and staff expertise. This allows us to better match students with sites and facilitate problem solving when difficulties arise. This is another reason why the majority of our clinical sites are located within the local community, state and region.

We believe that an optimal clinical education experience is dependent upon the clinical instructors’ knowledge of our program, their interest in educating students, and abilities as clinical educators. To assist in the development of the clinical instructor as clinical educator, the Department sponsors at least annually, the APTA Clinical Instructor Education and Credentialing Program, and the APTA Advanced Clinical Instructor Education and Credentialing Program. The Director of Clinical Education also provides as requested any on-site education per request fostering the development of the clinical instructor as a clinical educator.

We strive to make the best match possible between internship/experience positions and the student’s educational needs and interests. Since the goal is education as a generalist practitioner, a well-rounded, varied education is critical. When possible, a student's personal considerations will be accommodated, but not at the risk of jeopardizing the breadth and depth of a student’s overall clinical education. Clinical assignments are made through a collaborative decision-making process between the Director of Clinical Education, the student and the clinical site. The University, Program and Director of Clinical Education retains final decision-making authority in order to best meet the education goals of the program.