



# Holistic Admissions Overview

The American Physical Therapy Association’s mission states, “Building a community that advances the profession of physical therapy to improve the health of society.” A holistic admissions process is an important component of continued advancement toward this mission, as it helps to ensure the profession reflects the society that it serves, and having a profession that is representative has been shown improve health outcomes. Per a [2020 study by Wilber and colleagues](#), reported in Health Professions Education, “Greater diversity in the healthcare workforce is seen as a promising strategy for addressing racial and ethnic health disparities by improving access to healthcare from underserved patients, improving the patient experience, and increasing patient satisfaction.”

## Introduction

Holistic review involves admission or selection procedures that are aligned with the mission of an institution and consider various aspects of applicants such as their experiences, qualities, and academic performance, as well as the potential value they would bring to learning, practice, and teaching. With Holistic Review, admissions committees are able to evaluate the applicant as a whole person, rather than giving excessive weight to any single factor, particularly GPA and standardized test scores.

## Definition

The [Association of American Medical Colleges](#) defines holistic admissions as “mission-aligned admissions or selection processes that take into consideration applicants’ experiences, attributes, and academic metrics as well as the value an applicant would contribute to learning, practice, and teaching. Holistic review allows admissions committees to consider the “whole” applicant, rather than disproportionately focusing on any one factor.”

## Why It Is Important

Holistic admissions can be used to help reach the goal of increasing diversity within the profession of physical therapy, thereby improving access to physical therapist services in underserved populations and the population at large. Specifically:

- Research shows people are more comfortable seeing providers they can identify with and that have similar lived experiences.
  - A 2020 study published in JAMA Network Open, “[Association of Racial/Ethnic and Gender Concordance Between Patients and Physicians With Patient Experience Ratings.](#)” states: “Our study lends further support to the clinical benefit that others have found to be associated with racially/ethnically concordant patient-physician interactions. These benefits include better patient-physician communication, patient care, and outcomes and have been suggested to be attributable to decreased bias between patients and physicians.”

- Diverse educational cohorts are better prepared than more homogeneous cohorts to meet the needs of diverse patient populations.
  - [“The Holistic Admissions in Health Professions: Findings from a National Survey,”](#) published in 2014 by Urban Universities for HEALTH, states: “A key tenet of holistic review is the recognition that a diverse learning environment benefits all students and provides teaching and learning opportunities that more homogenous environments do not.”
- Holistic admissions provide better opportunities for students who have faced barriers to success in their lifetimes and who would have otherwise been excluded under traditional admissions processes.
- Holistic admissions help achieve multiple pillars of “A Vision for Excellence in Physical Therapy Education,” a report supported by the American Physical Therapy Association, the APTA Academy of Education, and the American Council of Academic Physical Therapy.

APTA offers a one-page “Quick Start Guide to Holistic Admissions” resource to assist physical therapy education programs with learning more about holistic admissions, initial steps, and things to consider when transitioning to a holistic application review process.