Knowledge of Pre-Physical Therapy Students Regarding Admission Criteria at Grand Valley State University

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Knowledge of Pre-Physical Therapy Students Regarding Admission Criteria at Grand Valley State University

By

Kerry Randolph
Beth Wieber

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Physical Therapy at Grand Valley State University Allendale, Michigan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PHYSICAL THERAPY

1997
KNOWLEDGE OF PRE-PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS REGARDING ADMISSION CRITERIA AT GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine how informed pre-P.T. students at G.V.S.U. are about the admission criteria for the P.T. program. A qualitative design was used.

Twenty pre-P.T. students from G.V.S.U. participated in the survey portion of this study. Eight of these students participated in follow-up interviews.

The survey was used to collect information regarding knowledge of admission requirements and sources of information. A personal interview was used to further probe and clarify survey responses. Data was analyzed to identify common themes.

Results indicate that academic advisors for pre-P.T. students at G.V.S.U. are not used as a major source of information. Students are fairly accurate in their knowledge of basic application and admission procedures, but are less knowledgeable about specific criteria such as the weighting of grades and the interview.
DEDICATION

for the countless trees who lost
their lives
in the production of
our thesis
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Trends in education are moving away from the liberal arts college and towards the professional college, to better satisfy students' job market concerns (Breneman, 1990). When a professional program such as physical therapy is introduced, a university can usually expect student enrollment to increase even if only a limited number of the applicants will be admitted (Bork, 1995). With this increase in enrollment, there is intense competition for the available positions in the program. According to Bork (1995), "it is not unusual for a [physical therapy] program to have up to 10 qualified applicants for each seat in a class."

Admission to the master's degree physical therapy program at Grand Valley State University (G.V.S.U.), like many professional education programs, is very competitive. The selection of students for admission to this program includes several different areas of academic and non-academic criteria. Because of the highly competitive nature of admission, students begin asking questions about admission criteria early during their undergraduate education. These questions may refer to the relative
weighting of grades, experience, and the interview. They may also refer to involvement in activities, classes, or clubs which may gain them extra points on their application.

Pre-physical therapy students go to their advisors, to health science professors, P.T. faculty, to students who have been admitted into the physical therapy program, and to fellow applicants for answers to their questions. Through our experience as applicants to the physical therapy program at G.V.S.U., we were exposed to a lot of misinformation, and we found it difficult to determine what sources were reliable and what information to believe. For example, one pre-P.T. student was told by an advisor that a 3.7 grade point average would not be high enough to be admitted into the program. In reality, many students are admitted with an equal or lower grade point average.

Data is not available about the sources used and reliability of these sources for information concerning the admission criteria for the physical therapy program at G.V.S.U. The purpose of our study was to determine how informed pre-physical therapy students at G.V.S.U. are about the admission criteria for the physical therapy program. By doing so, we have identified accurate information and common misconceptions among pre-physical therapy students in regard to admission criteria. We have also determined which sources pre-physical therapy students refer to most often for admission information.
The findings of our study may enhance the education of both faculty at G.V.S.U., as well as pre-physical therapy students. This study could help the faculty to become more informed about the concerns of pre-P.T. students, so that they may more effectively advise them.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

In the review of the literature, we found articles which addressed the advising and admissions processes. Several reports addressed the roles of the advising program. Other reports addressed the process and importance of evaluating an advising program. Several guides were found in the literature, which were aimed at preparing students for graduate school application. One study identified variables that are associated with admission into medical school. Although most of the literature was directed towards either pre-medical or pre-health students, one report focused specifically on the admissions procedures for pre-physical therapy (P.T.) students. This literature review will include a) academic advising, b) evaluation of advising, and c) admission variables in related professional programs.

Roles of Advising Programs

Academic advising programs contribute to informing students about academic and career planning. This includes informing students about admission criteria for professional programs.
The Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (1990), has set general standards for academic advising. Advisors must help students make educational plans that are consistent with their life plans. The philosophy of the advising program must be clearly stated. The expectations of the advisors and students must be well-defined. Advisors are responsible for assisting students in the selection of classes and accurately explaining educational requirements, policies and procedures. Advisors are also responsible for monitoring the progress of students to whom they have been assigned.

Fitzgerald (1981) discusses the multiple roles of academic advisors. She states that,

...academic advisors represent classic models of expanded boundary spanning, across multidisciplinary lines, impacting curricular decisions and curriculum development, career planning and placement, serving orientation and retention programs, and articulating campus-wide and sometimes community referrals. (p. 3)

She discusses the development of centralized advising for pre-professional or professional education, in which advising is the only responsibility that the advisor has at the institution.

Kramer (1978), in a paper presented at the National Conference on Academic Advising, stated that advising is, "...a necessity to be provided" (p. 1). The student, institution and advisor should all benefit from the advising
process. Academic advising is a credible activity when carried out in a competent manner.

At the same conference, Lagowski and Hartman (1978) discussed a program at an undergraduate institution, for advising all pre-professional students. This design demonstrates how an undergraduate institution can provide similar advising for many different professional programs. They proposed that advising in this manner can positively influence the student's competitiveness when applying to a professional program. Advising in this manner holds the advisor and college accountable for the student's academic preparation.

Dale, Milleret, and Samelson (1979), presented a paper at the National Conference on Academic Advising, in which they discussed the advising of pre-health professionals. Their focus was on advising students interested in becoming physical therapists, physicians, dentists, and nurses. As advisors at Kansas State University, they helped prepare students for professional education in several ways. They provided freshmen students with accurate written and verbal information about the requirements for their field of interest, including admission requirements. They considered it "essential for students to receive this information before they start classroom work" (p. 18). Students and advisors visited professional schools to which the students
were planning to apply. Advisors of pre-P.T. students were registered PT's.

Williams (1978) conducted a study of the pre-medical advising program at the University of South Florida. The advisors in this program were responsible for both counseling and evaluating the students. They assisted students applying to a professional school in medicine or dentistry, and they estimated the potential for a student's success as a professional in their respective field.

These articles demonstrate that academic advisors have many roles and that the academic advising program serves many purposes. Such roles include answering students' questions on admission policies, distributing written information about specific programs and assisting students with the selection of appropriate classes. When developing advising programs, institutions need to have well-defined goals so that institutional and student needs are met.

Evaluation of Advising Programs

To ensure the success of an academic advising program, the literature suggests ongoing evaluation. A paper presented by Wesley and Caldwell (1978) at the National Conference in Academic Advising, proposes that the purpose of an evaluation is to determine if academic advising makes a difference. The evaluation process is also used to determine what modifications need to be made, whether in the
advising system or in the advisors. Student feedback is an important part of the evaluation.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Service/Development Programs (1990) gives guidelines for evaluating advising programs. The evaluation must be systematic and performed on a regular basis. The student services and development programs along with the advising program need to be evaluated to ascertain whether student needs and goals are being met. They state that in an effective evaluation, "data collected must include responses from students and other significant constituencies. Results of these regular evaluations must be used in revising and improving the program goals and implementation" (p. 60).

Crockett, in a paper presented at the National Conference on Academic Advising (1979), states that 80% of the institutions responding to his survey reported that "they had no formal evaluation process for their academic advising program" (p. 78). He provided a list of seventeen questions in his paper, which gives advising programs a tool to begin their evaluation.

Evaluation is a valuable process in the academic advising program. The aforementioned literature suggests that the evaluation is under-utilized. This under-utilization can be detrimental to the success of an advising program in meeting student needs.
Variables Associated with Admission to Medical School

A study by Williams (1978), was done to determine the cognitive and non-cognitive factors which best predicted successful admission to medical and dental schools. He found that the top five variables associated with admission to medical school were 1) overall grade point average, 2) Medical College Admission Test science subscore, 3) overall load per term, 4) graduation from college with honors, and 5) advisor's rating. This author recommended that the results of this study be made available to advisors and to pre-medical students. With this information, advisors would have a better means of evaluating a student's potential for admission to their respective programs. Students would also be more informed about specific admission requirements. Williams stated that "admissions committees are traditionally vague in describing such requirements" (p. 8). It is therefore important for advisors and students to be aware of what factors the admissions committees are looking for, beyond what is stated in the university catalogue.

Physical Therapy Program Admissions

In a report by Bork (1995), several physical therapy programs in Florida self-analyzed their admission policies and procedures. These self-reports contain concerns and recommendations of the faculty at each program.

The University of Central Florida reported that the strengths of their program included using a documented
admissions process and having in place an actual protocol for selecting students. Another university reported concerns about their admissions process. They found discrepancies in the admissions procedures as described by the Dean, the faculty, and the university bulletin. Each of the above sources described the admissions procedures in a different manner. These discrepancies prompt questions about whether all applicants are being handled in the same manner, and about the potential for misinterpretation of information by students.

The Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University recommends in their report that:

when admissions policies and procedures are approved, the program is advised to openly share them with students, applicants, clinical faculty, and clinicians in the community. Information about the process may help to avoid rumors and misinformation. (p. 28)

This report highlights the need for a self-evaluation of admissions procedures, to identify areas of miscommunication.

Conclusion

We found nothing in the literature which specifically addressed how informed pre-P.T. students are in regards to P.T. admissions criteria. The literature found does reveal a need for our study as pre-professional students turn to advisors and books in order to gain information to prepare them for the application process. Therefore, it is
important to investigate the effectiveness of the advising process.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Design

A qualitative methodology was used to carry out this study. We selected this methodology because of the interpretive nature of our research. We were looking for subjects' perceptions about admission procedures and academic advising. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research is done to "uncover the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon" (p. 19).

Following approval by the Human Subjects Review Committee at G.V.S.U., subject selection began. Subjects were Grand Valley State University (G.V.S.U.) students. Twenty subjects responded to the survey portion of our study. Based on survey responses, eight subjects were selected for a personal interview. We believed an interview would be the most appropriate method for data collection at this stage of our study, because it allowed us to probe responses to gain more information about how participants perceive information. It also allowed us to clarify any misunderstandings of questions and answers.
Population/Sample

The sample comprised seventy-five pre-P.T. students from G.V.S.U. For this study, pre-P.T. students included sophomores and juniors in college who plan to apply to the physical therapy program at G.V.S.U. Seniors were not included in our study because many have previously been through the application process. To maintain confidentiality, administrators from admissions randomly selected seventy-five sophomores and juniors who declared themselves as pre-P.T. students to receive our survey. We provided admissions staff with prepared envelopes containing the cover letter (Appendix A) and surveys (Appendix B) along with self-addressed stamped envelopes to return the survey to us. Twenty surveys were returned. Based on responses we selected eight subjects to be interviewed. We selected four subjects who appeared to be well-informed and four who appeared to be the most misinformed about the admission criteria, based on survey results. Subjects signed a consent form (Appendix C) prior to being interviewed. Subjects were interviewed individually at a neutral location and time of their convenience. Subjects were audiotaped to enhance reliability and ensure accuracy of reporting information.

Procedures

A document review was conducted to identify areas of questions for the survey. These documents included the
university catalogue and pamphlets on the physical therapy program. The survey was developed in order to address knowledge about all areas of admission criteria, including grades, volunteer hours, the interview, activities, and letters of recommendation. The survey also addressed the sources from which students obtain information. Subjects received written assurance that responses would be kept confidential. Return of a completed survey indicated a subject's consent to participate in the survey portion of this research project. Survey responses were analyzed independently by each researcher to determine which subjects were most informed and which were least informed. The researchers were in agreement for six out of eight of possible interview subjects. The final two subjects were decided after further discussion between the researchers.

We used the survey responses to focus our interview questions (Appendix D). This interview was used to further explore questions that were on the survey, and to clarify responses. We also used the interview to determine more specifically where subjects were acquiring their accurate or inaccurate information. As suggested by Portney and Watkins (1993), this interview was pilot tested on two subjects from our population pool to determine the clarity and usefulness of our proposed questions. The two subjects for our pilot interview were volunteers at a pre-P.T. club meeting. Based
on these pilot interviews, no revisions to our interview questions were necessary.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in our study was maximized by the use of a personal interview in conjunction with a survey. This allowed us to clarify questions and probe responses. Audiotaping the interview session increased the accuracy of data transfer and confirmation of responses. Both researchers were present during all personal interviews to allow for a greater degree of consistency and objectivity. Using a document review, survey, and personal interview allowed for triangulation of the data which made our study more trustworthy. In a qualitative study, trustworthiness is equivalent to the reliability and validity required in a quantitative study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

**Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using an open-coding method. As described by Strauss & Corbin (1990), open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61). We used this method to identify the major themes gained from the document review, and responses from the survey and interview questions. We audio-taped each subject's interview session and later transferred the responses onto paper. This written data was then compared to the original audio recording to ensure accurate transfer of data.
Each question was a category, which contained each subject’s response to that particular question. Each category was then sub-categorized and named according to major themes in the responses. This open-coding method allowed us to determine major ideas held by pre-P.T. students about the admission criteria, and the sources of these ideas.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Document Review

We reviewed university catalogues and brochures to develop our survey questions. These documents provide students with basic admission and application requirements for the physical therapy program. These documents state that the minimum grade point average (GPA) needed for admission to the program is a 3.0, and that a GPA of 3.25 will make a student most competitive. These documents inform students that two letters of recommendation are required for applying to the program. One of these letters must be from a licensed physical therapist. The documents also state that a minimum of fifty hours of observational experience or volunteering in a physical therapy setting is required prior to applying to the physical therapy (P.T.) program. It is stated that an interview and on-site writing assignment are also parts of the admission process. Because the above information was found in the documents, we focused on these areas of the application and admission process in our survey.
Survey Results

From results obtained in the surveys, we developed our interview questions. Survey results were analyzed to look for common themes.

A 3.25 GPA is competitive for admission into the P.T. program. Responses from the survey varied. Three out of twenty subjects stated that a 3.2-3.4 GPA is competitive. Seventeen out of twenty believed that at least a 3.5 GPA is needed to be competitive. Nine out of twenty believed that at least a 3.7 GPA is needed to be competitive for admission into the P.T. program.

Grade point average counts for 37% of the overall application process. Six out of twenty subjects were fairly accurate in saying that grades count for 30-40% of the application process. Seven out of twenty said that grades count for at least 50% of the application process.

There is no GPA that guarantees a student admission into the P.T. program. All but one of our subjects was accurate in response to this question.

Due to the variability in subjects' responses regarding weighting of GPA and what GPA is needed to make an applicant competitive, we developed an interview question to further explore this issue.

A minimum of fifty volunteer hours is needed when applying to the P.T. program. Eighteen out of twenty of our subjects were accurate in response to this question. We
used a broader question to address the issue of volunteer hours in our interview. We wanted to gain subject perceptions about the overall role that volunteer hours play towards admission.

The interview counts for 43% in the overall application process for admission to the P.T. program. Twelve out of twenty subjects were fairly accurate in stating that the interview counts for 40-50% in the application process. Responses from subjects ranged from the interview counting 35-100% in the application process. Five subjects did not respond to this question. More than half of our subjects were fairly accurate in their answers; however, the rest of the responses were variable. Due to the variability in subject answers we developed questions to further explore this area. We also wanted to determine if subjects thought that GPA or the interview counts more in the overall application process.

Extra-curricular activities are an area that can earn an applicant "bonus points" on their application. When asked what type of extra-curricular activities can increase an applicant's chance for admission, subjects responded with a variety of answers. The most common answers were: leadership roles, community involvement, athletics and the pre-P.T. club. Due to the variety and vagueness of responses, we developed an interview question to further explore this area.
All but one subject answered correctly in saying that a physical therapist is qualified to write a letter of recommendation for a student applying to the P.T. program. Other responses included: professors, employers and other non-family members. Question number 13 on our survey asked subjects if they believed any individual's recommendation could positively influence their chances for admission. Subjects' answers reflected that the question was unclear. Because of the confusion, we re-worded the question to improve clarity. The new question was then asked to our interview subjects.

Question number 15 on our survey asked subjects to rate how much information was obtained from a variety of sources. These sources included: academic advisors, admissions advisors, brochures/course catalogues, non pre-P.T. students, other pre-P.T. students, P.T. department faculty and students in the program. We also allowed subjects to add any additional sources used for information, that we had not identified (other).

Brochures were the source from which subjects obtained the most information. Pre-P.T. students and students in the P.T. program were also found to be frequently used as an information source. Academic advisors and P.T. faculty provided less information than the above mentioned sources. Only three out of twenty subjects said that academic advisors were a major source of information. Fifteen out of
twenty said that they obtained a minimal amount of information from their academic advisors, or did not use their advisors as a source at all. Two out of twenty rated P.T. faculty as a major source of information. Thirteen out of twenty said that they obtained a minimal amount of information from P.T. faculty, or did not use them as a source at all. Because most subjects replied that their academic advisors and P.T. faculty were not used as a major source of information, we decided that it was important to further pursue this topic in our interview.

We asked subjects to rate how confident they were in their answers to our survey questions. Six of the twenty said that they were "very confident", eleven said that they were "somewhat confident" and two said that they were "somewhat unconfident". Because only six subjects were "very confident" of their responses, we asked our interview subjects what could be done to make them more confident about their knowledge of admission criteria for the P.T. program.

Interview Results

Data was analyzed using an open coding method as described in our data analysis section. The correct answer for each question was obtained from the P.T. department.

Question 1

What is your understanding of the role that grades play towards admission to the P.T. program?
The correct answer to this question is that grades count for 37% of the overall application for the program. A grade point average (GPA) of 3.25 is considered competitive for application to the program.

Responses to this question generated the following themes:
Four subjects stated that grades are an important part of admission but they are not the only thing that matters. Subject 2 stated, "They play a pretty strong role but not complete."
Subject 5 stated, "They are slightly important but . . . not as important as you think."

Two subjects stated that grades are being de-emphasized compared to previous years. Subject 1 stated, "They play a major role, but . . . it's trying to be de-emphasized."
Subject 8 stated, "You have to have a certain minimum requirement . . . but it's starting to play less [of a role]."

Two subjects stated that grades play a strong role towards admission. Subject 4 stated, "You need to have a lot higher grade point than [3.0] to be considered. I think you need at least a 3.6."
Subject 7 stated, "I think a lot of emphasis is on grades."
**Question 2**

Are there any particular classes that you think are more important or bear more weight towards admission to the program?

The correct answer to this question is that the GPA from prerequisite coursework is considered separately from overall GPA. An applicant must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 for prerequisite courses, but this GPA is not weighted more heavily than overall GPA.

Responses to this question generated one major theme. All but two subjects interviewed stated that they believed science and pre-professional classes bear more weight than general education courses. Subject 8 answered, "The sciences and anatomy, biology more so than the gen. eds."

Subject 2 answered, "Those that they have listed in the catalogue for the pre-professional program."

**Question 3**

What is your understanding of the role that the volunteer hours play towards admission to the P.T. program?

The correct answer to this question is that there is a minimum requirement of 50 hours. Students may earn "bonus points" for additional professional service.

Three major themes developed from interview responses.
The most prevalent theme came from four subjects who stated that an extra point is given for a higher number of hours. Subject 5 responded, "I know that you get more points on your application if you have . . . 150, and then it goes up in increments." Subject 6 responded, "If you have between 100-150 you can get an extra point."

Three subjects stated that the number of hours does not matter. Subject 3 responded, "I don't think it plays a big role in . . . whether you get in or not."

Three subjects agreed that it is beneficial to have a variety of settings for volunteer hours. Subject 6 responded, "I think the more variety you have, you're going to be able to talk about more experiences at your interview, so it's better to have more variety."

**Question 4**

What is your understanding of the role that the interview plays towards admission to the P.T. program?

The correct answer to this question is that the interview counts for 43% of the overall application to the program.

The majority of subjects (six) agreed that the interview plays a strong role towards admission.
Subject 3 said, "I believe the interview is the biggest thing they look at."
Subject 7 said, "It's a major part from what I understand. .. I think first impression is gonna play a big part on if they feel that you can be a P.T. student."

Of these subjects three believed that the interview plays a larger role than grades towards admission to the program.
Subject 7 said, "It sounds to me like the interview plays a bigger role than grades."
Subject 2 said, "I would say that [the interview] is the most important thing."

Only one subject believed that grades are weighted more heavily than the interview towards admission.
Subject 6 said that the weighting of the interview was, "Just below grade point."

**Question 5**

Give us a description of what you believe an interviewer would expect from an ideal candidate during the interview.

The correct answer to this question is that the interviewer is looking for effective non-verbal and verbal communication and other characteristics that the faculty believe facilitate success in the program and profession.
Two major themes developed from this question. All but one subject discussed the importance of personality traits, including people skills and communication skills. Subject 3 answered, "I would say a good deal of people skills." Subject 2 answered, "Someone who can work with people, not just a paper kind of person." Subject 6 answered, "Someone who is socially rounded."

Four subjects discussed the importance of having an understanding and interest in physical therapy and health care. Subject 7 answered, "A genuine interest in physical therapy." Subject 8 answered, "Someone who's enthusiastic about learning and research."

Question 6

What is your understanding of the role that extracurricular activities play towards admission to the P.T. program?

The correct answer to this question is that activities such as service on campus, in the community or professionally, and teaching or research experience may earn an applicant points toward admission into the program.

All but one subject discussed that being involved in extra-curricular activities shows that a person is well-rounded.
Subject 4 stated, "If you have a lot that shows that you're well-rounded and able to manage your time and still be successful in school."

Subject 6 stated that involvement in extra-curricular activities will, "let them know that you know more about life than just grades."

One subject stated that extra-curricular activities can give you an extra point towards admission.

Subject 5 stated that, "The P.T. students talked to us and they say . . . that certain [activities] would give you points."

Question 7

When it comes to letters of recommendations, do you feel there are any individuals whose recommendation may bear more weight than others because of their position, influence, or affiliation with the program? If yes, please give us some examples of individuals.

The correct answer to this question is that no source is given more weight than others towards admission.

Subjects' opinions on this issue were variable. Three subjects felt that recommendations from certain individuals would definitely bear more weight.

Subject 4 answered, "I think that if one of my recommendations were from someone that the faculty were familiar with, that might influence them."
Subject 2 answered, "I would say [a recommendation from] someone affiliated with this program would weigh more than someone out of state."

Two subjects felt the person giving the recommendation does not influence a student's chances for admission. Subject 3 answered, "I don't see where one physical therapist will sway the tide."

Subject 6 answered, "I think that as long as the recommendation is good, I don't think it's going to matter."

Three subjects were unsure about this issue. Subject 5 answered, "I don't know if it will help you, but I don't think it will be a minus."

**Question 8**

Tell us your experience with academic advisors in preparation for applying for the P.T. program.

Half of our subjects stated that their advisors knew very little about the P.T. program and sought help elsewhere.

Subject 2 stated, "He didn't know too much about the P.T. program. He told me to go talk to someone else."

Subject 4 stated, "My advisor, personally, he doesn't know much about the actual P.T. program. . . . He said he didn't know, so I had to go elsewhere to find out."

Two subjects stated that their advisor was very helpful.
Subject 3 stated, "My academic advisor was real helpful. . . . She's pretty much on top of things."

Subject 6 stated, "I think I've had pretty good advising."

Two subjects stated that they have not met with their academic advisor.

Subject 1 stated, "I have never spoken to my academic advisor. . . . For me everything seems real clear-cut."

**Question 9**

What sources have you found to be the most helpful and reliable in answering your questions regarding the application process?

Subjects cited using several different sources to gain information about the application process.

Half of the subjects discussed that a large amount of their information came from pre-P.T. club meetings. Subject 6 responded, "The pre-P.T. club meetings have been the biggest source."

Subject 5 responded, "The pre-P.T. club. We had some physical therapy students come in and talk to us and they were really helpful.

Another source cited was students who are in the program. Subject 8 responded, "I've found out the most information through students who've already done it."

One subject mentioned the P.T. department as being a useful source for information.
Subject 2 responded, "An advisor from the physical therapy department, because they could answer any questions that I had."

**Question 10**

As a pre-P.T. student, you may have been given suggestions about how to increase your chances of admission. Whether you believe them to be true or not, please share with us a few examples of what has been suggested to you, and by whom.

Four subjects have been told that a variety of volunteer settings is helpful. Subject 4 said, "Get volunteer hours in a variety of settings, I probably heard that from the faculty and other students."

Subject 7 said that the resident assistant at her living center, "suggested lots of volunteer hours, involved in all different areas."

Four subjects (including subject 7 above) have been told that a large number of volunteer hours may increase chances for admission. Subject 3 said, "More hours I've heard from a lot of students."

Four subjects have been told that extra-curricular activities may enhance chances of admission. Subject 8 said, "Extra-curricular activities beyond volunteering in just physical therapy settings. . . . Any
involvement on campus. Being a teacher's assistant in anatomy, that was told to me by students who have applied already."

Subject 7 said, "Involvement in extra-curricular activities, I've heard the pre-P.T. club, or the Kids on the Block. One girl told us she got an extra point, or an extra half-point for being involved in that program."

Two subjects have been told that being a Grand Valley student may increase chance for admission. 
Subject 7 said, "I think you get an extra point for being a Grand Valley student."
Subject 1 said, "One of my instructors [from a community college] told me to get my butt transferred over to Grand Valley, so that I have my GPA established here."

**Suggestions for improvement**

Five subjects gave suggestions on what could be done to help them be better informed on the admission procedures.

Two subjects stated they wished the P.T. department would be more helpful in providing information to students about the admission requirements.

Subject 6 said, "This is a friend's experience: she went to get help or advice from a physical therapy advisor. . . . She told her that she usually doesn't deal with sophomores and that she should come back a year later. So maybe if they were more responsive to our questions."
Two subjects said that they wished it was more clear as to where to go or who to talk to for answers to their questions.

Subject 6 said, "Maybe a well-known number that we can call. . . . If there was a number that we could be positive that we would get the correct answers. Because we've obviously heard more than one answer for more than one thing."

Subject 5 said, "Make it more obvious of who to see. Maybe if I see someone in the physical therapy department but they don't give you names, they don't say where to go. . . . Unless you get some steering in the right direction in the first place, it's kind of hard to find the rest of the info that you need. You've got the obvious stuff in the catalogue, that's easy, but the rest of it, you have to know somebody to ask."

Subject 7 said, "Maybe more available pre-P.T. advisors not just health science."
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Academic advising programs are responsible for informing students about admission criteria for professional programs. These responsibilities include scheduling classes as well as career planning. Advisors must help students make educational plans that are consistent with their life plans. (Council for the Advancement for Student Services/Development Programs, 1990).

Pre-health professional advisors at Kansas State University provide students with accurate written and verbal information about the requirements for their field of interest, including admission requirements. They considered it "essential for students to receive this information before they start classroom work" (Dale, et al, 1979, p. 18). According to this literature it is the responsibility of academic advisors and the P.T. program to disclose admission requirements to pre-P.T. students. This is the only way to ensure that pre-P.T. students receive accurate and consistent information.

One of our survey questions required subjects to indicate how much information they have obtained from several possible sources. Only three out of twenty subjects
surveyed indicated academic advisors as a major source of information. Fifteen subjects indicated that their advisors provided them with a minimal amount of information or were not used as a source of information at all. The P.T. department was cited by two subjects as a major source of information.

University catalogues and brochures contain general information about the P.T. program and are readily available to all students. These catalogues do not contain information about the relative weighting of criteria and can not answer all of the individual questions that a student may have. Due to the competitive nature of the program, students want and need answers to questions regarding specific requirements. During the interviews some subjects stated that they did not know where to go to have their questions answered. Different sources provided them with different answers for the same question. These inconsistencies were seen during the interviews when different subjects provided different answers for a single question.

The subjects who stated that their advisor did not know much about the P.T. program admission requirements had advisors who were fairly new to the university. The subjects who stated that their advisor was knowledgeable about the P.T. program admission requirements had advisors
who have been directly involved in the P.T. student selection process.

Half of the subjects interviewed stated that a large amount of information they received came from the pre-P.T. club meetings. The pre-P.T. club is independent from the P.T. program, and is organized by pre-P.T. students. The purpose of the club is to learn more about P.T. and inform students about applying to the program.

Students seeking admission to the P.T. program at G.V.S.U. may also be applying to programs at other universities. For this reason, students need to know the admission requirements and procedures to decide which program they may be most qualified to apply for.

Subjects we interviewed demonstrated fairly accurate knowledge about general admission criteria to the P.T. program and have been informed through various sources on ways to enhance their chances for selection into the program.

Subjects demonstrated accurate knowledge in the following areas: Minimum GPA and minimum number of volunteer hours needed for application, who is qualified to write letters of recommendation, characteristics important to display in the interview, and the importance of extra-curricular activities.

Subjects were the least accurate in the following areas: The relative weighting of GPA and the interview,
what GPA makes a student competitive for admission, and the weighting of prerequisite GPA compared to overall GPA.

Despite the accurate knowledge of subjects interviewed, of the twenty subjects who participated in our study, only six were "very confident" of their answers to our questions regarding admission criteria. This suggests a need for specific strategies to ensure that pre-P.T. students receive consistent information from sources known to be reliable. Based on subject responses we have generated a few suggestions to address this issue.

Academic advisors could be better informed regarding the admission process so that they can better advise their pre-P.T. students. This could be especially helpful for new faculty who are unfamiliar with the program. Advisors could be identified to work exclusively with pre-P.T. students, including freshmen and sophomores, so that their questions may be answered early on in their education.

Written information could be provided regarding the admission criteria and process that contains more information than that found in general brochures and the university catalogue. This information should include relative weighting of the different criteria.

The pre-P.T. club advisor is a member of the P.T. faculty. This is beneficial because the pre-P.T. club is a major source of information for many students. The P.T. department could provide the pre-P.T. club officers with
accurate written information, so that this information could be shared with members of the club.

These are merely suggestions brought forth by concerned pre-P.T. students. We realize that some aspects of the admission process can not be disclosed. For example, if students were given a list of extra-curricular activities that would earn them an extra point on the application, they may participate in these activities, not out of interest, but solely to receive extra points.

Limitations

We realize that there are limitations to our study. This study applies only to G.V.S.U.'s P.T. program because admission criteria, academic advisors and students vary at each institution. This study is not intended to be representative of other universities, or other professional programs at G.V.S.U., but only to enhance G.V.S.U.'s P.T. admission process. A second limitation is the use of a volunteer sample. By using volunteers, our subjects may not be representative of all pre-P.T. students.

Future Research

Because this study applies only to the P.T. program at G.V.S.U., similar studies could be done for other professional programs at G.V.S.U. and at other universities. Future studies could also address the knowledge of potential sources that students may use for information. This could be addressed by interviewing or surveying academic advisors,
program faculty, and students currently in the professional program.

Conclusion

The role of academic advisors includes assisting students with class scheduling and career planning. The results of this study indicate that academic advisors for pre-physical therapy students at Grand Valley State University are not used as a major source of information in preparation for the application process. Based on subjects' responses, advisors are perceived as not having the necessary information to help students prepare for the application process. However, students are fairly accurate in their knowledge of application and admission procedures as they turn to other sources for this information.
References


APPENDIX A

SURVEY COVER LETTER

January 7, 1997

Dear Pre-Physical Therapy Student:

The enclosed questionnaire is part of our study to assess how knowledgeable pre-physical therapy (PT) students are in regards to the admission process for the physical therapy program at Grand Valley State University (GVSU). We are physical therapy students at GVSU, and this study is being done as partial fulfillment of the requirements for our degrees of Master of Science in physical therapy. Personal experiences as pre-PT students have led us to the study at hand. This study is an attempt to identify areas where students are well-informed, areas where students are misinformed, and common sources where students receive this information.

You have been chosen for this study through a random selection process which included available names of pre-PT students. The questionnaire will require approximately 10 minutes to complete. We request that you answer the questions without referring to other people or outside sources other than those currently in your possession. All information shall remain completely confidential. We will be the only individuals to see the completed surveys, and names will not be included in the completed study. A few individuals will be selected for follow-up interviews to clarify answers or to ask further questions. We request your name and phone number for this purpose. By returning the completed survey, you are giving us your consent to use the information provided.

Your completion and return of this survey is essential to our study. The results will be available to faculty and advisors to assist in the advising of pre-PT students like yourselves. Please complete the survey and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope by January 24, 1997. If you have any questions, you can contact us at the address below, or call us at (616) 669-5754. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a subject in our research, please call Paul Huizenga at (616) 895-2472. If you are not a pre-PT student, please disregard this letter.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Beth Wieber

Kerry Randolph

6510 Balsam Dr. Apt B104
Hudsonville, MI 49426
**APPENDIX B**

**SURVEY**

Knowledge of Pre-Physical Therapy Students Regarding Admission Criteria at Grand Valley State University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Academic Advisor</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Have you previously applied to the PT program?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Best time to contact you</th>
<th>Transfer student?</th>
<th>If Yes, from where?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please answer all questions to the best of your knowledge, using information you have gained so far as a pre-PT student. If you do not know any information pertaining to a question, please write "N/A". If you do not understand what a question is asking, please indicate by telling us. Feel free to elaborate on any of your answers. Thank-you for your participation.

1. What do you consider a competitive grade point average for admission into the PT program?

2. Is it your understanding that there is a specific grade point average that guarantees admission into the program? If yes, please identify what you believe that grade point average to be.

3. What percentage does grade point average count in the overall application for the program?

4. What is the minimum number of volunteer hours required, prior to applying for the program?

5. In comparison to volunteer hours in the field, what bearing on your application does a job as a paid physical therapy aide or technician have?

6. How do 160 volunteer hours influence your application, versus 70 hours?
7. How does an applicant get selected for an interview?

8. What percentage does the interview count in the overall application for the program?

9. During the interview, what is an interviewer looking for in an applicant?

10. What types of extra-curricular activities, if any increase your chances for admission into the program?

11. Does being a member of the pre-physical therapy club affect your overall application for the program? If yes, in what ways?

12. Who is qualified to write you a letter of recommendation for admission into the program?

13. Are there any individual(s) whose letter(s) may positively influence your chances for admission into the program?

14. Is there anything that has not been addressed in the above questions, that you believe will enhance your chances for admission?

15. Please indicate the sources from which you have received information, regarding admission into the program. Use the scale on the right to indicate how much information you have obtained from each source:

- academic advisor 0 = source not used
- admissions advisor 1 = minimal information obtained
- brochures/course catalogue 2 = fair amount of information obtained
- non-pre-PT students 3 = major source of information
- other pre-PT students
- PT department faculty
- students in the PT program
- other (please specify) _____________
16. How confident are you regarding the accuracy of the answers you have given?

___ very confident
___ somewhat confident
___ somewhat unconfident
___ very unconfident

Please return the completed survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided by January 24, 1997.

Thank you again for your participation!
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I understand that this is a study of how familiar pre-physical therapy students at Grand Valley State University are with the admission criteria and procedures for the physical therapy (PT) program. I also understand that knowledge gained will be made available to faculty at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) to aid advising of pre-physical therapy students.

I also understand that:

1. participation in this study will involve one 30 minute interview, regarding my knowledge of the admissions criteria and procedures for the PT program at GVSU.

2. that I have been selected for participation because I am a pre-PT student at GVSU and have volunteered for this study.

3. it is not anticipated that this study will lead to physical or emotional risk to myself.

4. the information I provide will be kept strictly confidential and the responses will be coded so that identification of individual participants will not be possible.

5. a summary of the results will be made available to me upon request.

6. participation in this study is in no way associated with admission into the PT program at GVSU.

I acknowledge that:

"I have been given an opportunity to ask questions regarding this research study, and that these questions have been answered to my satisfaction."

"In giving my consent, I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time."
"The investigators, Kerry Randolph and Beth Wieber, have my permission to use my statements in research."

"I hereby authorize the investigators to release the information obtained in this study to the PT program at GVSU. I understand that I will not be identified by name."

"I have been given the investigators' phone number (616-669-5754) so that I may contact them at any time if I have questions."

"I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information, and that I agree to participate in this study."

_____________________/______  ____________________/______
Witness          Date       Participant          Date

___ I am interested in receiving a summary of the study results.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your understanding of the role that grades play towards admission to the P. T. program?

2. Are there any particular classes that you think are more important or bear more weight towards admission to the program?

3. What is your understanding of the role that volunteer hours play towards admission to the P.T. program?

4. What is your understanding of the role that the interview plays towards admission to the P.T. program?

5. Give us a description of what you believe an interviewer would expect from an ideal candidate during the interview.

6. What is your understanding of the role that extracurricular activities play towards admission to the P.T. program?

7. When it comes to letters of recommendations, do you feel there are any individuals whose recommendation may bear more weight than others because of their position, influence, or affiliation with the program? If yes, please give us some examples of individuals.

8. Tell us your experience with academic advisors in preparation for applying for the P.T. program?

9. What sources have you found to be the most helpful and reliable in answering your questions regarding the application process?

10. As a pre-PT student, you may have been given suggestions about how to increase your chances of admission. Whether you believe them to be true or not, please share with us a few examples of what has been suggested to you, and by whom.