Section I: Request

The Dixie State University (DSU) Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program receives $5,000 annually beyond payment of faculty salaries and benefits, which is insufficient to operate an educational program of this kind. The program is dependent on course fees and program fees for all other expenses. It is proposed that program fees and course fees be discontinued and program differential tuition be implemented. This tuition must cover part of the salary and benefits for one administrative position, in conjunction with other programs in the department. It covers capital equipment, maintenance, repair and replacement of current equipment, as well as all costs of instruction including clinical education. The program proposes a differential of $90.00 per credit hour be added to the standard DSU tuition.

Section II: Student and Market Demand for the Program

The DSU Physical Therapist Assistant program accepts 16 students per year. We typically see 35-50 total applicants for the 16 available positions in the cohort, with the number of qualified applicants increasing annually 3 of the past 4 years. There are three other PTA programs in Northern Utah. DSU has the only program serving residents of the southern part of the state. DSU PTA graduates consistently find employment, both within Southern Utah and across the country. Post-graduate surveys indicate that six months post-graduation, all graduates have found at least part-time employment in the field of physical therapy. The program consistently attracts applicants from all areas of Utah, as well as Idaho, Nevada, California, and Wyoming. The program has received applications from as far away as New Hampshire, Texas, Oklahoma and Ohio. According to Bureau of Labor statistics, PTAs have an expected job growth of 31% nationwide from 2016-2026.
Section III: Impact of Differential Tuition Rates on Student Access and Retention

Differential tuition must be planned carefully in order for the DSU Physical Therapist Assistant program to remain competitive with other institutions. It must be rolled out and explained adequately in order for students to make informed decisions regarding which school to attend. Students will need to be taught how to compare differential tuition to other institutions’ base tuition and course or program fees. If this is not understood by students, a decrease in applications and enrollment in prerequisite courses may occur.

Section IV: Tuition Rates of Comparable Programs at Other Institutions*

DSU base tuition and fees are competitive with other USHE institutions, while dramatically lower in cost than Provo College. Even with the proposed differential tuition, DSU is the most economical program in the state when tuition and fees are included. There are two other programs within the state of Utah. Program costs at the two competing programs in the state allow us to increase our tuition and remain competitive. Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) has a total program cost of $11,000, according to their website. Provo College is the third program in Utah, with a tuition cost of $750 per credit hour for core courses, totaling $42,000 for the core, or technical, portion of the program. The tuition and fees of the DSU PTA program are all inclusive. Both Provo College and SLCC add course fees and other expenses to the total costs listed in the graph below.
*Data retrieved online through institution websites; DSU data equals base tuition plus PTA program differential tuition.

Section V: Potential Earnings Capacity of Program Graduates

New graduates from the PTA program usually start at approximately $25 per hour depending on location and setting. A full time, entry level PTA can expect between $45,000 and $58,000 per year. The starting salary in many other states is higher.

Section VI: Societal Importance of the Program

The DSU Physical Therapist Assistant program is one of the premier programs in the region. Students consistently score above national averages on Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) examinations. In addition to providing an excellent education for students, the PTA Student Club on campus participates in many community outreach activities benefitting the DSU and St. George communities. The program is an integral part of the physical therapy community in the state of Utah and annually participates in events to educate physical therapy professionals statewide, including hosting the state physical therapy conference each spring.

Section VII: Noteworthy Facts

Dixie State University is one of only three PTA programs in Utah, and the only program south of Provo. Program Director Drew Wilcox has served on the Utah Physical Therapy Association Board of Directors for 4 of the past 5 years, and just began his 3rd term in January 2019. He also serves as an on-site reviewer for the PTA program’s accrediting agency, the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE).