



# NORTHEAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE **PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT**

## CLASS OF '24 COMPLETES LSVT BIG CERTIFICATION THROUGH GRANT FUNDING

While the rest of the students at Northeast were beginning their holiday break in December 2023, the Class of 2024 committed their first two days of break to complete 14 hours of training. The PTA program applied for an Innovation Mini Grant offered by the college and received approximately \$3200 to pay for the students' registration fees.

Laura Schwanebeck, PTA program director, wrote the grant proposal stating LSVT BIG is an evidence-based treatment approach for individuals with Parkinson's Disease (PD) and can also benefit patients with other neurological conditions commonly seen in physical therapy. Providing this certification for PTA students will expand their knowledge in advanced treatment techniques, enhancing their clinical practice. Since LSVT BIG is not included in the standard PTA curriculum, this training provides valuable, early exposure to professional development activities—an essential aspect of their ongoing career growth.

From 2000 to 2020, an average of 518 individuals in Nebraska were diagnosed with PD each year (dhhs.ne.gov), yet only nine PTAs within a 90-mile radius of Norfolk currently hold an LSVT BIG certification (lsvtglobal.com). Nationally, the Parkinson's Foundation reports that over 90,000 people are diagnosed with PD each year in the U.S., with projections estimating that 1.2 million Americans will be living with PD by 2030 (parkinson.org). In response to these figures and a recommendation from the PTA Program Advisory Committee, the program recognized the value of offering this certification to better equip graduates to serve our region.



*The Class of 2024 met some Norfolk residents who have been impacted by Parkinson's Disease.*

The students were able to use their LSVT BIG skills during their clinicals if their clinical site had a physical therapist who was also certified. Student feedback overwhelmingly supported continuing to offer the certification to future PTA cohorts. The Class of 2024 believed this training would enhance their employability and positively influence their ability to care for future patients with PD.

## LSVT BIG GRANT/CERTIFICATION

The PTA program has been awarded an innovation mini grant to help offset the cost for PTA students to complete the LSVT BIG certification. The cost for each student is approximately \$325. No other PTA program in the state or surrounding states offers the LSVT certification during the program. According to a survey done by Tere Siedschlag, PTA program faculty, 82% of the rehabilitation directors and clinic

### PTA PROGRAM FACULTY COMPLETE EXAM WRITER'S TRAINING

In February of 2024, the three PTA program faculty traveled to Boston, MA, to attend the Federation of State Board of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) two-day course "Workshop for Educators." This workshop focused on exam writing and learning how to create test questions that align with the type of questions found on the National Physical Therapy Exam. The faculty learned the basic structure of a well-written multiple-choice question, how to write a case study-based question, and gained exposure to the new video questions being used on the board exams. The faculty began implementing several exam writing strategies in their spring semester exams and continue to modify exam questions in all courses.

Andrea Suhr, a PTA faculty member, explains other areas the training covered. "Other than helping write better exam questions, the course assisted with an exam analysis. I implemented a student version of this into all classes to help the students prepare for final exams. I also use the exam analysis feature to improve each exam. This helps ensure we can create similar testing environments, examination protocols, and eliminate or adapt any inequitable exam questions."

FSBPT offers post license services such as continuing competence, guidelines for continuous professional development and healthy practice, and Jurisprudence assessment modules. Unfortunately, there are no resources for Nebraska yet. FSBPT website carries up to date information on the PT Compact. This may be beneficial if you are a traveling PTA or looking to relocate in the future.





## CURRICULUM CHANGES & REHABILITATION TECHNICIAN CERTIFICATION

Student success is the top priority for the PTA program faculty, who continuously assess and refine the program to better meet students' needs. Recognizing that many students enter the program with little experience in study skills, time management, and organization, faculty have integrated these essential tools early in the curriculum to help students develop and strengthen them as they progress toward clinical practice.

In collaboration with the college, the PTA program has proposed a major curriculum change, extending the coursework over four semesters instead of the current three. This adjustment is based on extensive review of accreditation standards, the National Physical Therapy Exam content, other PTA programs, and areas where students historically have struggled. Additionally, the revised curriculum will allow students who do not wish to continue to the sophomore year to earn a Rehabilitation Technician Certification. This certification was developed in consultation with local physical therapy clinicians and approved by the PTA Program Advisory Committee.

Pending approval, the new curriculum will take effect in fall 2025, with the goal of improving student retention and graduation rates. PTA faculty member Tere Siedschlag supports the change, stating, "Spreading the content over four semesters and introducing an earlier clinical experience will help reduce the pace and make the material more manageable. Student success is our number one goal."

## SIEDSCHLAG CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF TEACHING

Tere Siedschlag began her 30th year teaching in the PTA program. She helped the late Marvin Hall, PT, develop the program at Northeast in 1994. In reflecting on the past 30 years Siedschlag said, "So much has changed at the college and in the profession. Within the program there have been many improvements in space, curriculum, and equipment.

In the first couple of years, Marvin and I shared a computer. It wasn't until about the third year we each got our own computer. That seems crazy to me now. I have completed five accreditations of the program, have had 415 graduates, and have assigned almost 1250 clinical affiliations for students. In 2002, we didn't have a program director, and I served as the only full-time faculty member, clinical coordinator,

as well as the director. I had three adjunct faculty to help teach three of the courses in the program. I believed so much in this program, I didn't want to see it close because we didn't have a director."

"The physical therapy profession has certainly changed in the past 30 years. We've seen incredibly positive changes for the PTA at both the state and national levels. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) now grants PTAs one full vote and eligibility to serve on the Executive Committee. APTA-Nebraska also provides PTAs with one full vote and the opportunity to serve as a delegate to the APTA. These changes have been pivotal in maintaining PTA involvement and strengthening their voice within the organization."

"These are exciting times for PTAs in the profession. If you are not a member of the APTA, I strongly encourage you to become one. The benefits of belonging are invaluable both personally and professionally." Siedschlag said.

"I know Marv would be proud of where we are as a program. His goal was to bring healthcare to rural Nebraska. That continues to be the mission of the PTA program. With the help of the Hall family, we now have a PTA scholarship in memory of Marvin. He's still living out his dream." Siedschlag concluded.



## RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Additional recruitment efforts to increase enrollment in the program are underway. Tere Siedschlag is leading this effort by establishing a communication pipeline with 10 alumni, clinicians, or employers, encouraging them to take on the challenge of recruiting at least one student to the program each year. As enrollment in all physical therapy education programs across the state has declined in recent years, the need for therapists continues to rise.

Tere has been in contact with several clinicians and alumni who are willing to help recruit students to the program. "They know our numbers are down and are committed to both our program and expanding healthcare access in rural Nebraska," Siedschlag said. "Alumni and clinicians often interact with potential students, whether through high school observation programs or as patients. I've simply asked them to identify and encourage those who show potential to pursue a career as a PTA."

"The commitment really isn't time consuming at all. If a PT or PTA knows a patient or high school student who would be a good fit for the program, they simply encourage the student to contact us for a tour and more information about the program and profession," Siedschlag said. "If your community or high school hosts a career day, please reach out and we will send you some Northeast PTA promotional materials to hand out to prospective students." Email Tere directly at [tsiedschlag@northeast.edu](mailto:tsiedschlag@northeast.edu) or [pta@northeast.edu](mailto:pta@northeast.edu).

## CLASS OF 2025 (FROM THE CLASS PRESIDENT)

The Class of 2025 has hit the ground running and is flourishing through this fall semester with learning new, exciting information and anticipating the treatment of our own patients very soon. We recently held a Massage Day as a fundraiser for our class to attend the APTA Nebraska state meeting and gain valuable experiences for our future careers.

Our community service activities have included participating in the PATCH Health Fair, where we provided hand massages and educated the public about our profession. Additionally, our class volunteered at the ALS in the Heartland Walk at Skyview Lake, an event aimed at raising awareness for this progressive disease.

For Physical Therapy Month, the class is hosting a free "Water Bar" on campus three times during the month of October. Our goal is to promote the physical therapy profession as well as the PTA program to the college community.



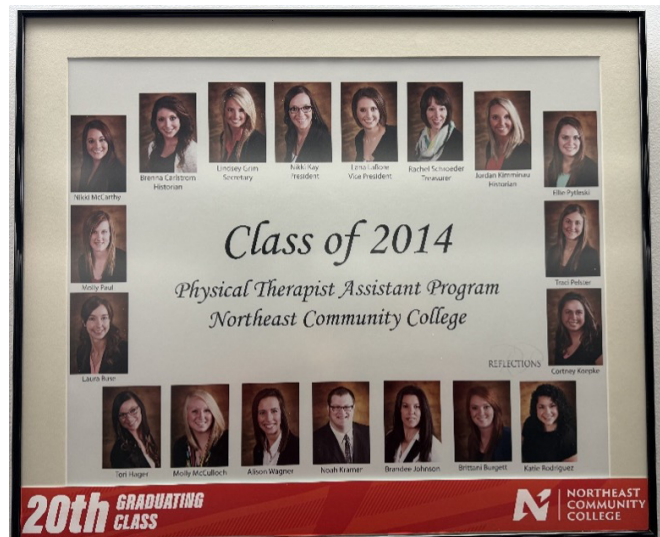


## MILESTONE GRADUATIONS

### Five Years - Class of 2019



### Ten Years - Class of 2014



### Fifteen Years - Class of 2009



### Twenty Years - Class of 2004



### Twenty-Five Years - Class of 1999



## DID YOU KNOW...

the APTA has launched APTA Engage that allows clinicians to opt in to volunteer positions in a variety of ways and as short term and long term at both the state and national level. Several committees and task forces need to hear the PTA perspective, and this streamlines this process by allowing the clinician to select how they want to serve the profession. For more information, visit the APTA website.



## IMPORTANT DATES:

Legislative Day – February 4, 2025 – The APTA Nebraska members meet in Lincoln to advocate for our profession by meeting with the senators. Our legislators want to hear patient and clinician stories of how reimbursement issues impact practice.

APTA NE Annual Conference March 28, 2025, at the Younes Conference Center North in Kearney, NE.

## MEET COURTNEY LOECKER

Courtney Loecker, PTA, CLT is a native from Hartington, Nebraska and a 2019 graduate of the Physical Therapist Assistant program at Northeast Community College. After graduation, Courtney and her husband (Adam) moved to Lincoln, Nebraska where she pursued a career in Cancer Rehabilitation. She currently works at Balance Mobility Lincoln Cancer Rehab, an outpatient clinic that provides physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy services to patients of Lincoln and surrounding communities. In 2021 she received her Lymphedema Therapist Certification

from Klose Training. Since then, she has pursued additional certifications in the treatment of head and neck cancer, Strength After Breast Cancer, and Kinesiotaping techniques to better serve her patients.

Courtney is passionate about helping this patient population before, during, and following their acute oncologic treatments with maintaining their strength, mobility, and quality of life while reducing overall symptom burden. Courtney assists with coordinating care with other members of the healthcare team to ensure patient needs are met. She finds fulfillment in the complexity of her work because it demands creativity and responsiveness in adapting to the evolving needs of her patients.

In her free time, you can find Courtney spending time with family and friends, camping, hiking, or paddle boarding with her husband.



Northeast Community College Physical Therapist Assistant Newsletter

## What's Happening with YOU?

We'd love to hear from you! Give us a shout out where you live, where you work, and any updates you'd like to share. We will feature this in future newsletters. You may email your updates to [tsiedschlag@northeast.edu](mailto:tsiedschlag@northeast.edu).

