

DSH-A/Cuesta College Psychiatric Technician Program

Informational Handout

Psychiatric Technician Program Description:

Cuesta College offers a twelve-month training program which is physically located at the Department of State Hospitals-Atascadero (DSH-A) for persons interested in becoming a licensed Psychiatric Technician. The Psychiatric Technician Program provides students the necessary training and skills needed to provide care to individuals with mental illness and/or intellectual disability. Upon completion of the program, graduates must pass a State Board Licensing Exam to obtain a license to practice as a Psychiatric Technician. Graduates of the DSH-Atascadero/Cuesta College PT Program have one of the highest pass rates in the state! Psychiatric Technicians typically work under the supervision of a physician, psychiatrist, or a registered nurse. Licensed Psychiatric Technicians are employed throughout California. Most work in state hospitals, developmental centers, state and county correctional facilities, county and private mental health facilities, addiction treatment centers, work activity and day treatment programs and special education programs.

The Psychiatric Technician Program is a full-time, Monday-Friday program with typical hours of 6:45-2:30 each day. School days consist of classroom theory or clinical practicum assignments. Student attendance is mandatory in order to complete the state-mandated training hours required of a Psychiatric Technician student. Students are required to attend every class and complete every assignment. Any excused absences must be made up. Students with excessive absences will be dismissed from the program. Students are required to travel to clinical sites throughout San Luis Obispo County, Santa Barbara, and Monterey County. Students MUST have reliable transportation.

Psychiatric Technician State Board Licensing Exam Pass Rates:

Psychiatric Technicians are licensed by the Board of Vocational Nurses and Psychiatric Technicians (BVNPT). To view recent pass rates, go to http://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/pdf/pt_pass_rates.pdf

Application Process: (INCOMPLETE APPLICATIONS ARE NOT ACCEPTED)

The Psychiatric Technician Program accepts applications year-round. There are three application deadlines each year: in January, May, and September. Please visit the Cuesta College website or contact the Psychiatric Technician Program Office for specific dates. Once the application deadline has passed, candidates will be ranked on a list by point total. If a tie occurs, a computerized random draw will be used to select the candidates. All applicants will be notified of their list placement in writing. The top 60 applicants will receive instructions to begin the clearance process. The clearance process consists of numerous steps, including a physical exam with TB testing and immunizations, a drug screen, and livescan background checks through both DSH-Atascadero and the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education. The top candidates on the list at the end of the processing period will be accepted into the program. Additionally, eligible applicants who wish to also be employed part-time at DSH-Atascadero during the second and/or third term will be required to complete and pass a Training and Experience Exam, in addition to having positive employment references.

Time Commitment:

The time commitment required by students enrolled in the program is great. Students should expect to devote at least 34-35 hours each week to in-class and clinical assignments and another two to four hours per day for homework and study assignments. Students receive the State holidays off during the year and a total of four weeks off between terms; there is a one- or two-week break between each 16-week semester. The Psychiatric Technician Program adheres to strict attendance and punctuality policies and students who violate these policies may be dismissed from the program.

**PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PSYCHIATRIC TECHNICIAN PROGRAM
CUESTA COLLEGE NURSING/ALLIED HEALTH
FUNCTIONAL ABILITIES**

Certain functional abilities are essential for the delivery of safe, effective nursing care. These abilities are essential in the sense that they constitute core components of nursing practice, and there is a high probability that negative consequences will result for patient/clients under the care of nurses who fail to demonstrate these abilities. Programs preparing students for the practice of nursing must attend to these essential functional abilities in the education and evaluation of its students.

The nursing faculty at Cuesta College has identified those functional abilities considered to be essential to the practice of nursing. The functional abilities are reflected in course objectives and in clinical evaluation tools, which are the basis for teaching and evaluating all nursing students.

Applicants seeking admission into the Psychiatric Technician or Allied Health programs who have questions about the functional abilities and appropriate reasonable accommodations are invited to discuss their questions with one of the program faculty or the program director. Reasonable accommodation will be directed toward providing an equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities while adhering to the standards of nursing practice for all students. Continuing students who are unable to maintain functional abilities with reasonable accommodation will be withdrawn from the program.

Standards

The practice of nursing requires the following functional abilities with or without reasonable accommodations:

- 1. Visual acuity** sufficient to assess patients and their environments and to implement the nursing care plans that are developed from such assessments.
Examples of relevant activities:
 - Detect changes in skin color or condition
 - Collect data from recording equipment and measurement devices used in patient care.
 - Detect a fire in a patient area and initiate emergency action.
 - Draw up the correct quantity of medication into a syringe.
- 2. Hearing ability** sufficient to assess patients and their environments and to implement the nursing care plans that are developed from such assessments.
Examples of relevant activities:
 - Detect sounds related to bodily functions using a stethoscope.
 - Detect audible alarms within the frequency and volume ranges of the sounds generated by mechanical systems that monitor bodily functions.
 - Communicate clearly in telephone conversations.
 - Communicate effectively with patients and with other members of the health care team.
- 3. Olfactory ability** sufficient to assess patients and to implement the nursing care plans that are developed from such assessments.
 - Detect foul or unusual odors of bodily fluids or spoiled foods.
 - Detect smoke from burning materials.

4. **Tactile ability** sufficient to assess patients and to implement the nursing care plans that are developed from such assessments.
Examples of relevant activities:
 - Detect changes in skin temperature.
 - Detect unsafe temperature levels in heat-producing devices used in patient care.
 - Detect anatomical abnormalities, such as subcutaneous crepitus, edema, or infiltrated intravenous fluid.
5. **Strength and mobility** sufficient to perform patient care activities and emergency procedures.
Examples of relevant activities:
 - Safely transfer patients in and out of bed
 - Turn and position patients as needed to prevent complications due to bed rest
 - Hang intravenous bags at the appropriate level
 - Accurately read the volumes in body fluid collection devices hung below bed level.
 - Perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation
 - Ability to lift 50 pounds repetitively unaided
6. **Fine motor skills** sufficient to perform psychomotor skills integral to patient care.
Examples of relevant activities:
 - Safely dispose of needles in sharps containers.
 - Accurately place and maintain position of stethoscope for detecting sounds of bodily functions.
 - Manipulate small equipment and containers, such as syringes, vials, ampules, and medication packages, to administer medications.
7. **Physical endurance** sufficient to complete assigned periods of clinical practice.
8. **Ability to speak, comprehend, read and write in English** at a level that meets the need for accurate, clear, and effective communication.
9. **Emotional stability** to function effectively under stress, to adapt to changing situations, and to follow through on assigned patient care responsibilities.
10. **Cognitive ability** to collect, analyze and integrate information and knowledge to make clinical judgments and management decisions that promote positive patient outcomes.

The Psychiatric Technician Program Curriculum (consists of 55.5 units):

PSYT 110 a three-week Introduction to Psychiatric Technician (6.5 units)

- Working in a forensic facility
- CPR/First aid
- Critical thinking & study skills
- Crisis intervention
- Managing assaultive behavior

****Students will need to pass a Final Exam with a 77% in order to move onto PSYT 207****

PSYT 207 a 16-week Nursing Science Term (16 units)

- Nursing fundamentals
- Caring for the elderly
- Medical and surgical nursing
- Anatomy and physiology
- Communicable diseases
- Pharmacology
- Nutrition

Clinical sites are in the community at local skilled nursing facilities, day programs, and hospitals.

****Students must be achieving a 77% or higher in order to enter the clinical setting in week 5.****

PSYT 209 a 16-week Psychiatric Nursing Term (17 units)

- Communication skills & team building
- Group therapy & self-discovery
- Mental & personality disorders
- Pharmacology
- Medication administration
- Forensic nursing

Clinical sites are at the Department of State Hospitals-Atascadero and various community mental health settings.

PSYT 208 a 16-week Developmental Disabilities Term (16 units)

- Normal growth & development
- Intellectual impairment
- Caring for the disabled person
- Genetics
- Medication administration
- Use of adaptive equipment
- Behavior management techniques
- Pharmacology
- Sign language

Clinical sites are in residential care facilities, day programs, work activity programs, child development centers, and special education classrooms.

Strategies for Success:

- Students who anticipate needing financial assistance in order to attend Cuesta College should apply for education funding even though they have not yet been notified about acceptance into the program. You may apply online at <https://www.cuesta.edu/student/studentservices/finaid>.
- Possess a stable level of physical and mental health, which enable the student to care for patients in the clinical setting. Ability to lift and carry up to 50 pounds.
- Speak, read, and write the English language fluently and proficiently at college level. Professional use of medical terminology and correct spelling are expectations during the program.
- Be prepared to drive anywhere in San Luis Obispo, Monterey, and Santa Barbara Counties for clinical assignments.
- Practice good self-care, stress management, and relaxation skills.
- Form and participate in a study group.
- Possess good organization, time management, and priority setting skills.
- Continue to explore and utilize available Cuesta College campus support services including counseling, Career Center, re-entry, study, and tutorial skills, learning skills, library, health center, and financial aid.
- Develop strong study skills and demonstrate strong critical thinking skills.
- Establish a strong support system.

Clearance Process:

Once an applicant has been notified that they are being processed for a particular class, they must clear a physical examination, immunizations, a drug screen, two sets of fingerprints, and obtain a Cuesta College Student ID # to be cleared for entry into the program.

Health Screen/Physical:

1. Applicants are expected to provide complete medical and psychological history, including any illness, treatment and/or medications.
2. A physical examination and history will be conducted.
3. A 9-panel drug screen must be taken and passed with negative results.
4. Proof of immunity is required upon admission.

Fingerprints: In order to participate in clinical assignments and meet clinical objectives, applicants will need to complete and clear two sets of fingerprints.

1. **Department of State Hospitals-Atascadero (DSH-A).** The Employment Office at DSH-A will contact you to arrange for DSH-A fingerprints and these will be provided at no charge. Prints must clear three weeks prior to classes starting.
2. **SLO County Office of Education.** Once applicants are notified that they are being processed to attend school, it is mandatory that applicants contact the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education at **(805) 782-7236** to schedule an appointment to have fingerprints done. Fingerprints are completed in both their San Luis Obispo and Atascadero offices. Prints must be taken by the given deadline and must clear three weeks prior to classes starting. **Cost to the applicant is estimated to be \$80.00.**

Convictions: State hospitals and psychiatric technician programs shall not employ/admit an applicant if he or she has ever been convicted of any of the following felony offenses. These offenses will also disqualify you from attending the program. Applicants on formal or informal probation are also disqualified. These crimes include any crime specified in Penal Code Section 290, which generally includes:

Offenses of a sexual nature	Child abuse	Assault with a deadly weapon or with force
Murder, battery, or robbery	Mayhem	Poisoning or adulterating food, drink, etc.
Sexual battery	Kidnapping	Drug sales/transport for sales
Elder or dependent adult abuse	Spousal Rape	Arson or attempted arson
Aiding or abetting an escape		Intercourse based on fraud

If an applicant has been convicted of a misdemeanor offense or a felony offense other than those listed or has been arrested for any other criminal offense, applicant shall be subject to administrative review.

Part-Time Employment for Students:

Currently, DSH-Atascadero offers part-time employment to eligible students enrolled in the Psychiatric Technician Program's **second and third terms**. This offer of employment is separate and apart from the student's status in the program. Students who choose not to be employed while in the program may do so with no effect on their standing in the program. Please direct all questions about part-time employment to the DSH-A Employment Office at 805-468-3384.

Additional Cuesta College Admission Requirements:

1. Apply to Cuesta College via <https://www.cuesta.edu/become-student/apply/index.html> for the Summer 2026 semester after 4/1/2026. Complete the **MANDATORY** online orientation: <https://www.cuesta.edu/become-student/orientation/onlineorientation.html>
2. Send **official** high school and other college (if applicable) transcripts* to;

Cuesta College, Office of Admissions & Records
P.O. BOX 8106
San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8106.

***NOTE: This is in addition to the official transcripts that are required to be sent to the Psychiatric Technician Program Office with your Psychiatric Technician Program application.**

Financial Aid Info:

It is highly recommended that applicants apply for financial aid!

- Complete the **2025-2026** FAFSA to be eligible for state and federal funding <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa> Visit the FAFSA home page for deadline information. The FAFSA is also required to apply for Cuesta College Scholarships.
- Cuesta Scholarship Program Application. Go to the Cuesta College Financial Aid website to apply!
- Various other sources of funding are available to students. Contact the Financial Aid Office at 805-546-3952 for information, or go to the Cuesta College financial aid website <https://www.cuesta.edu/student/student-services/financial-aid>
- America's Job Center of California offers financial assistance for educational opportunities – up to the entire cost of the PT program! Visit the AJCC website www.SLOWorkforce.com to see if you qualify.

In order to receive financial aid and/or scholarship benefits, applicants must submit official transcripts to Cuesta College Office of Admissions & Records as noted above. It is strongly recommended that you complete the FAFSA application as soon as possible. You can apply now, even prior to being notified of admission status into the Psychiatric Technician Program.

Disabled Student Programs & Services (DSPS):

Any student who feels he/she may require an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Disabled Student Programs & Services (DSPS) Office at Cuesta College to discuss his/her specific needs. Their office is located on the San Luis Obispo campus in Building 3300 (805-546-3148) or on the North County campus in Paso Robles in Building N3100 Room N3121 (805-591-6215). Students with documented disabilities should contact the DSPS office to coordinate reasonable accommodations. This may include, but is not limited to extended time on exams, distraction-free testing environments and/or other accommodations. Applicants are encouraged to contact the DSPS Office as soon as possible for needed services.

Other Student Services:

Students enrolled in the Psychiatric Technician Program have access to all Cuesta College student services and supports (i.e., bookstore, library, computer lab, counseling, health center, tutoring center, etc.).

Prior to classes beginning, the selected candidates will receive a letter from the Psychiatric Technician Program Office indicating the date/time of the mandatory Registration/Orientation meeting held at Cuesta College's North County Campus in Paso Robles. **Candidates will need to bring their Cuesta College ID number and complete the MANDATORY Online Orientation in order to register for PSYT 110 and PSYT 207 during this meeting (see Additional Cuesta College Admission Requirements: pg. 5).** Login to MyCuesta account, click on the Student tab, and choose Online Orientation from the Steps to Success channel.

APPROXIMATE COST OF THE PSYCHIATRIC TECHNICIAN PROGRAM: \$3,867.29-\$4,337.29
(APPROXIMATE COST FOR OUT-OF-STATE RESIDENTS: \$20,135.29-\$20,605.29)
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About Cuesta College Registration Fees:

Fees are subject to change by the State of California and may occur at any time during the academic year. If fees change **after you have registered**, you will be refunded or billed the difference.

Enrollment Fee for California residents: \$46/Unit = \$2,254.00

Non-Resident* Fee: \$332/Unit + Enrollment Fee (\$46/Unit) = \$18,522.00

**A non-resident student is one who has not had a legal residence in California for more than one year immediately preceding the beginning of the Cuesta College semester the student plans to enroll. Contact the Admissions Office at (805) 546-3140 for more information.*

Pre-Registration Costs:

Selected candidates must pass two background checks, a drug screening, a physical examination, and meet all immunization requirements prior to registering for the program.

The first background check is for the SLO County Office of Education in order to enter clinical facilities. You will be contacted by the Employment Office at DSH-A when to take your second set of fingerprints. They will be provided at DSH-A at no charge to you.

You will receive instructions to complete the drug screening, physical exam, and immunizations through the CastleBranch portal. CastleBranch fees are subject to change at any time. The candidate is responsible for the cost of the physical examination and any immunizations that are needed.

Pre-Registration Requirements	Fee
Background Check - SLOCOE	\$80.00
Background Check - DSH-A	N/A
CastleBranch Psych Tech Package	\$71.99
Physical Exam*	\$30.00-\$200.00
Immunizations*	\$0.00-\$300.00
Estimated Total Pre-Program Costs	\$181.99-\$651.99

**Cost of physical and immunizations will vary depending on the healthcare provider and your insurance.*

1st Term – PSYT110 “Orientation” & PSYT207 “Nursing Science”	Fee
PSYT 110 - 6.5 Units (3-Week Mandatory Orientation)	\$299.00
PSYT 207 “Nursing Science” – 16 Units	\$736.00
Uniforms/shoes (Instructors will inform you of specific color/styles; encouraged to purchase two sets of scrubs)	\$130.00
Textbooks 1 st Term (approximate)	\$315.40
Equipment/Supplies: Watch, stethoscope, penlight, notebooks, paper, etc.	\$75.00
Estimated Total Costs (1st Term)	\$1555.40

2 nd Term – PSYT209 “Psych Nursing”	Fee
PSYT 208 “Psych Nursing” – 17 Units	\$782.00
Textbooks 2 nd Term (approximate)	\$127.95
Estimated Total Costs (2nd Term)	\$909.95

3 rd Term – PSYT208 “Developmental Disabilities”	Fee
PSYT 208 “Developmental Disabilities” – 16 Units	\$736.00
Textbooks 3 rd Term (approximate)	\$89.95
Estimated Total Costs (3rd Term)	\$825.95

State Licensing Exam Application Fees*	Fee
Application Processing Fee	\$345.00
FBI & DOJ Fingerprint Processing Fees	\$49.00
Estimated Total Exam Cost (due at the end of 3rd term)	\$394.00

**Fees apply to the BVNPT licensure exam ONLY. Further information regarding the cost of the license can be found at <https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/licensees/fees.shtml>.*

Health Guidelines: COVID-19

DSH-Atascadero/Cuesta College Psychiatric Technician Program's primary concern is to protect your health and wellbeing, while supporting successful completion of your educational goals. The health and welfare of families, peers, community, and particularly our vulnerable clients in the clinical setting, depends on personal commitment to stay safe and vigilant in our infection control practices.

- Self-monitoring will be expected daily. You will self-screen daily for COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19).
- Self-Screening - All daily COVID-19 self-screenings will be documented on a daily attendance sign in sheet.
 - What you will see on your attendance sign in sheets is a self-attest to the below:
By initialing, I confirm and attest to the following: I have no signs or symptoms of infection with the COVID-19 virus [fever, chills, cough (dry or productive), dyspnea or difficulty breathing, fatigue, myalgia/muscle aches or body aches, headaches, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, nasal congestion or runny nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea]; within the last 48 hours I have not come in contact with anyone who is positive for COVID-19 without wearing an N-95 mask.
- You will be tested when experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms or experience a high-risk exposure to COVID-19.
- You will receive an antigen test on campus with your instructors the morning you express feeling symptomatic.
- If you test negative, you will go home and come back when you are asymptomatic.
- If you test positive you will go home and isolate for a minimum of 5 days.
- If you have been exposed. That is if you were around someone for longer than 15 minutes who tested positive and you were not wearing an N95 mask and shield, you will be required to serial rapid antigen test. This will be scheduled with your instructor.
- After being COVID Positive and Returning to School:
 - Students who have been out on a 5-day isolation, may return on day 6 if asymptomatic and will be required to wear a N95 mask until day 10.
- Clinical Site Screening Process – students will follow agency/facility policies and procedures for screening for COVID-19 when in the clinical setting. A detail of each site expectations will be explained in additional course policies.

Grooming and Appearance:

Students are expected to maintain safe grooming practices as a representative of the DSH-A/Cuesta College Psychiatric Technician Program.

- No unnatural hair colors are permitted (e.g., blue, pink, orange, green, purple, etc.). Wigs must comply with these rules.
- Facial piercings are allowed with approved plug. Oral piercings are not allowed. All body modifications will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the instructors for safety issues.
- All tattoos must be covered.
- The need to wear a respirator mask could arise at any time. Facial hair, if present, can prevent a proper mask seal. This includes “stubble” and “neck beard”. CDC guidance for facial hair provided at your DSH-A N95 respirator fit testing reports soul patch, side whiskers, and pencil moustaches are allowed. If you are unable to properly wear a respiratory mask you will not be able to participate in the clinical day and will be asked to leave.

Department of State Hospitals - Atascadero/Cuesta College



Psychiatric Technician Program



MAP TO PSYCHIATRIC TECHNICIAN PROGRAM

