



Community College of Allegheny County

Radiation Therapy Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the characteristics of an excellent Radiation Therapist?

A: A Radiation Therapist is a special kind of person. They are problem solvers and critical thinkers who possess the analytical skills necessary to work in a highly complex and rapidly evolving field. Communication skills, oral and written, are essential. However, to be a Radiation Therapist, one must be able to attain more than just academic and technical proficiency.

A radiation therapist must possess the compassion and sensitivity necessary to provide the physical and psychological comfort of the patient. One must communicate effectively with fellow health care professionals as well as providing education and support to patients and their families as they cope with the stress associated with a cancer diagnosis.

Q: “Why choose the Radiation Therapy program at CCAC?”

A: The Radiation Therapy programs at CCAC provide comprehensive, hands-on clinical learning in award-winning, dynamic and innovative learning environments with the most up-to-date technology in the field of radiation oncology such as CT Simulation, 3D, Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy, Volumetric Modulated Radiation Therapy, Image Guided Radiation Therapy, Surface Guided Radiation Therapy, stereotactic, brachytherapy, and respiratory management techniques.

Students learn first-hand from certified radiation therapists, most of whom graduated from the CCAC program as well as other highly qualified Radiation Oncologists, Medical Physicists, Dosimetrists, and Nurses to develop skills in treatment planning and delivery, dose calculation, quality assurance, radiation safety, and patient management. Participation in other technologies such as total body irradiation, Halcyon[®], MR linear accelerator and Gamma Knife[®] are offered.

Radiation therapy classes are also taught by certified radiation therapists with years of experience in teaching and working as radiation therapists in the regional health systems and the classes are small enough to provide individual attention with a wealth of resources for student development.

In the classroom, the Virtual Environment Radiotherapy Training ([VERT](#)) system replicates the treatment delivery controls to bring hands-on training to practice real-life scenarios in a virtual setting to learn from mistakes without risk to the patient. Students go into the clinic with more confidence and enhanced technical abilities.

Q: “What are clinicals?”

A: The Radiation Therapy Program is a competency-based program which will be performed at an off- site JRCERT (Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology) approved clinical education setting. Students work under the direct supervision of a certified radiation therapist at all times and must provide their own transportation to clinical education settings.

Q: “How many students apply to the radiation therapy program?”

A: About 10-16 for the certificate program and about 30-35 for the A.S. degree program.

Q: “How are candidates chosen?”

A: Initially, applicants are scored based on overall GPA, prerequisite and other course grades (especially math and sciences), career essay, career exploration feedback, healthcare or customer related experience, and recommendations. During the interview stage, applicants are assessed on quality of responses, communication and interpersonal skills, and foundational prerequisite knowledge.

Q: “Is there an online program option?”

A: The Radiation Therapy Program is offered as an “on campus” (Allegheny campus) curriculum only. Some program courses are offered online or in a hybrid face-to-face and synchronous Zoom setting. Students must be in the Pittsburgh area to attend on-campus courses and clinical education settings.

Q: “Can I take the program classes at night?”

A: The Radiation Therapy Program is a day-time program. There is no night-time curriculum track offered. A sizable portion of the program is spent in off campus clinical locations, which are open during daytime hours only. There are, however, some general education courses that may be offered in the evening.

Q: **“Can I take classes at any campus at CCAC?”**

A: Many prerequisite and general education courses are offered at all campuses, but all alpha code “RTH” and program science classes are offered only at the Allegheny Campus. Visit the online [Course Catalog](#) on the CCAC website for schedules and locations.

Q: **“Am I able to work while attending the program?”**

A: The Radiation Therapy Program is an in-depth and fast-paced program that requires a full-time commitment. Students must be on campus or at the clinical facility Monday through Friday during daylight hours with the possibility of an evening class and are advised to spend at least 3 hours per day on independent study. Working a full-time job during the program is difficult and most students who work, choose part-time on evenings and/or weekends, but are still required to keep the program obligations a top priority.

Q: **“May I take any of the required courses before I am admitted to the Radiation Therapy program?”**

A: It depends. All alpha code “RTH” courses may only be taken once enrolled in the RTH program. General education courses can be taken before program admittance, if the prerequisites are met. It is strongly recommended, however, to take PHY-125 and PHY-126 *after* enrolled in the program. NOTE: Completion of other degree-required courses does not guarantee admittance into the Radiation Therapy Program.

Q: **“Is there a waiting list for the radiation therapy program?”**

A: 2 students from the interview process will be added to a waitlist. For the certificate program, waitlisted applicants will be notified by the 6-week mark before the semester starts. This gives the applicant time to complete clearances and immunizations before starting clinicals. For the A.S. degree program, waitlisted applicants may be notified up through the first week of the semester as clinical work does not start until the second semester.

Q: **“If I am not accepted, do I still go on a waitlist for the next program?”**

A: No. Students who are not accepted may reapply the following program. Applications are not kept on file.



Q: “Do students get breaks during the radiation therapy program?”

A: Yes. The radiation therapy program follows the CCAC academic calendar with breaks between semesters and several holidays. If accepted to the program, it is understood that you are making a commitment to place your learning as a top priority and vacations are reserved for semester breaks, holidays, or after the program has been completed. Students are not permitted to take class or clinical time off for vacation.

Q: “If I have transcripts from another school, how can I find out if they are accepted?”

A: Schedule to meet with an [academic advisor](#) to determine which credits are transferable into the program.

Q: “If I have further questions not found on the Radiation Therapy Program page, who may I contact to ask?”

A: You may contact the Allied Health Secretary at 412-237-2681 or 412-237-2642 or the Radiation Therapy Program Director, Kelli Collette, via email at kcollette@ccac.edu. Provide a phone number and a suitable time to reach you.