

Respiratory Therapist Program

Online Overview

*To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived,
This is to have succeeded.* *—Bessie Stanley*

That quote (often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson) expresses the passion of **respiratory therapists** whether they are working with premature newborns, children, adults or the elderly, in a hospital, clinic or home care agency. It's all about breathing - that essential life-giving process.

What a Respiratory Therapist does



Respiratory therapists assist in the diagnosis, treatment and education of patients suffering from diseases of the heart and lung. The respiratory therapist may work in intensive care or a regular patient unit, diagnostic laboratory or home care. Some respiratory therapists provide a wide variety of care during a work shift, while others specialize in a particular area such as pediatrics or adult intensive care.

Respiratory therapy requires a strong background in sciences such as math, physics and biology. (If you didn't take much math or science in high school, remedial courses are available at Western to prepare you for the program.) The therapist is expected to be able to handle stressful situations and make multiple decisions regarding patient care during the course of the day. The career also demands a dedication to helping others and an ability to work with other health professionals as a valuable member of the health care team. Breathing is essential 24/7, so respiratory therapists are often expected to work on weekends, holidays and all shifts.

Job Outlook

There is a **high demand** for respiratory therapists and that is expected to continue. On an AARC Human Resources Survey in 2005, employers reported nearly 12,000 vacant full-time positions while educational programs graduated fewer than 4,500 new therapists.

According to the survey, there are nearly 133,000 respiratory therapists active in the workforce and about three-fourths of them work in acute care hospitals. The mean annual salary for all respiratory therapists is \$56,000 (\$27.03 per hour) and the starting pay is over \$41,000 (\$19.97 hourly). The female to male ratio is approximately 60 to 40. Hospitals in Western's district offer starting salaries of over \$40,000 and as high as \$64,000. Hourly rates increase by \$1 to \$4 per hour for evening and night shifts, and some hospitals pay extra on weekends as well.

Graduates of Western's program are highly regarded in the local community and throughout the region. Recent grads are working nearby in La Crosse, Winona, Eau Claire, Madison, Milwaukee, the Twin Cities, Rochester and as far away as Texas, Florida and Alaska.

Program Layout

This is a **two-year** associate degree program. During the **first year**, you complete the foundational science, math and general education requirements. **Respiratory Therapy Survey**, taken during the spring semester, is the only first-year program course. The first year schedule can be modified to meet your needs. Some students spend two years or more completing the first year course requirements. However, you should plan to take **Respiratory Therapy Survey** in the last semester before entering the program summer session.

*Important notes about **Anatomy and Physiology (A&P)** courses: Because performance in A&P courses is reflective of how well a student will perform in program courses and on national board exams, General A&P is a pre-requisite for program admission. Advanced A&P is highly recommended but not required.*

*A&P is typically taught as a 2-semester series. At Western, and most of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges, the courses are divided into 'General' (primarily anatomy) and 'Advanced' (primarily physiology). At some colleges and universities, the courses are divided into 'A&P 1' (A&P of half the body) and 'A&P 2' (the other half – usually including the respiratory and circulatory systems). As a respiratory therapist, you'll need to understand the entire body. Thus, you must either take **General A&P** or **BOTH** A&P 1 and A&P 2.*

During the **summer session** and **second year** of the program, you will focus completely on respiratory therapy courses and related clinical experiences. The summer and second year must be taken in the published sequence because the courses are so closely interrelated. You should be prepared for a somewhat intense year of study. **Scheduling is done in 4-week blocks.** Classroom blocks generally consist of two courses, with some lab time. Those are followed by clinical blocks where you apply classroom content in the actual patient care setting. Thus, each semester will have 4 alternating blocks: classroom – clinical – classroom - clinical.

A word about working during school



Because of the intensity of the program, it is **strongly** recommended that you work no more than 20 hours a week during the second year of the program. Most students find that working every other weekend is the most they can manage and even that may be too much.

Classroom Notes

Our goal is great student learning, not just great teaching! We have found problem-based learning (PBL) and other strategies to be more productive than traditional lecture format for many of our classes. In PBL, a patient case or clinical problem replaces the textbook chapter as the organizing idea. By managing the case or resolving the problem, you learn the content and develop critical thinking skills.



Clinical Notes



Students complete clinical experiences at a minimum of two clinical sites. The two La Crosse hospitals (Gundersen Lutheran and Franciscan Skemp) are the primary clinical sites. Additional clinical sites, such as Winona and Mauston, are used for some rotations.

You will spend 32 to 40 hours per week in the hospital setting during the five 4-week clinical blocks. You should expect to do 2 weeks of day shift (approximately 6 am to 3 pm) and 2 weeks of evening shift (approximately 3 to 11 pm) in each clinical block. Each student will do at least one week of night shift (approximately 11 pm to 7 am) during the last semester.

Student Accident Insurance: All students involved in a clinical course as part of their program will be automatically enrolled in Western Technical College's Accident Only Insurance Plan.

This insurance covers injuries that you may incur on the way **to or from** any clinical experience, and any injury that you might sustain **at the clinical site while performing your clinical duties as a Western Technical College student**. This insurance **ONLY** covers you for injuries related to these student experiences; your choice of insurance for other portions of your life remains your responsibility. This insurance is considered a secondary insurance to any primary insurance you may have. There is no deductible for this coverage at this time.

Once you are enrolled in your clinical course, your instructor will provide further information and details on how to obtain your insurance card. Answers to questions can be found at www.gallagherkoster.com/WesternTech.

Specific Program Requirements and Recommendations

- A scrub-like **uniform** and **nametag** are required during clinical rotations. Students receive information about the uniform upon admission to the program. It is purchased at a local uniform store and costs about \$30. One nametag is provided for you and an extra may be purchased for about \$5.



- Every profession has tools that are important for success. For the respiratory therapist, a **stethoscope** is the most important tool. A good stethoscope costs about \$50, but you can spend \$250 or more. You'll learn what to look for in a good stethoscope in the Survey course. You'll also want good white **walking shoes**, a water-resistant **watch**, and a pair of **goggles** to protect you from splash and splatter.

- Students are responsible for their own **transportation** to clinical sites.

- To help you prepare for the credentialing exams, **mock CRT and RRT exams** are taken during the last several weeks of the program. These self-assessment exams have been developed by the national testing agency (NBRC) and are administered online just like the board exams. Cost for the mock exams totals approximately \$140 which is included in the course materials fee.
- Each spring, students and faculty attend the **North Regional Respiratory Care Conference (NRRCC)**, held in Minnesota or Wisconsin. The conference provides an opportunity to network with potential employers and other students, learn from experts in the profession, compete in the Sputum Bowl (a trivia contest, not a spitting competition!) and spend some relaxed time together. Costs for registration and hotel typically run \$150-200.
- In addition to textbooks, a home **computer** with internet access is very helpful. Western's library has computers but library hours may not meet a student's time demands. Western has some computers for resale at a reasonable cost.
- Students who don't have any healthcare experience or who want a head start with basic patient care skills are strongly encouraged to take a **Certified Nursing Assistant** course.

An Important Note about Body Art

In the Health and Public Safety Division, you may display no **Body Art or Piercing** that might be considered offensive. Most employment settings have policies that are generally broad, however they do reserve the right to deny employment and student clinical placement if body



art or piercings are found to be offensive to those in that setting. The wearing and displaying of jewelry in the health care or public safety setting is generally limited to wrist watches and wedding rings or small non-dangling earrings. The purpose of this limitation is related to infection control, safety and public perception of the employees while they are on duty.

If you have significant visible body art and piercings, we are unable to guarantee that you will be able to be placed for the multiple clinical experiences that the program requires. You may be asked to cover the body art with clothing or dressings or remove the piercings in order to complete your rotation. If your program has a more restrictive policy on body art or piercings, it will be enforced. It is your decision whether or not to enter the program based on the uncertainty of being accepted at clinical sites.

Student Respiratory Therapist Club

The Student Respiratory Therapist Club is open to all students in the program. Club members have been actively involved in the tobacco-free campus initiative through Student Government committees and participate in several community events. The Club also provides fundraising opportunities to help cover the costs of the field trip to the NRRCC.



After Graduation

After graduation, you'll be eligible to take the National Board for Respiratory Care (NBRC) entry level exam which is used as the credentialing exam in most states. Graduates who pass that exam earn the title **Certified Respiratory Therapist (CRT)** and may apply for **state licensure**. Since 2005, 100% of Western's graduates passed this exam on the first attempt, compared to national rates of approximately 75% for new grads and 25% for repeat candidates. Over the 25 years the program has existed, more than 97% of our grads have earned the CRT credential on their first attempt!

After successfully completing the entry level exam, Western graduates are eligible to take the NBRC's Advanced Practitioner Exams and earn the title **Registered Respiratory Therapist (RRT)**. Our pass rates on those exams are well above the national rates as well. Additional specialty exams for Pulmonary Function Technologist, Neonatal/Pediatric Specialist and Sleep Disorders Specialist are also available. The cost for each exam is approximately \$200. Many employers reimburse for the advanced level exam costs if you earn the credential.

To learn more about the profession

- ❖ Check out the website of the American Association for Respiratory Care at <http://www.aarc.org/career/intro/> and watch the **Life and Breath** videos.
- ❖ Job shadow a respiratory therapist in the hospital:
 - At **Franciscan Skemp**, call the Volunteer Services department at (608) 785-0940 ext 4203.
 - At **Gundersen Lutheran**, contact the Human Resources Service Center (608) 775-4743.
 - You may contact the director of respiratory care at any hospital, explain your request and ask whether they would permit you to job shadow. Most are willing to provide the opportunity to students enrolled in a program. If you live in a rural community and are hoping to work at a local hospital, doing a job shadow there is an excellent introduction. However, you are encouraged to shadow at a large trauma facility as well to get a clear idea of the expectations of the program.



- More information about job shadowing is posted at the end of this orientation document. Please read it over so you are prepared to make a positive impression.
- Many hospitals will let you shadow any day of the week. Your experience will be best if you arrive around 7:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m. or 3:00 p.m. In between times, you might see a lot of not-so-exciting paperwork.

General Program Admission Requirements in more detail

Step 1: Gain Admission to Western Technical College

1. Complete and submit the Wisconsin Technical College System **application**. If you are interested in more than one program, you must complete an application for each program. A one-time \$30.00 application fee made payable to Western must be submitted with the application. Applications are available at the Welcome Center in La Crosse or at any extended campus location. Applications are also available online at <http://www.westerntc.edu/admissions>.
2. Submit **official transcripts** from high school and, if applicable, college. If submitting college transcripts, it is possible that you may have taken courses that can be applied toward your chosen program. To have your transcript evaluated for transfer of credit, you must complete and submit the form found at <http://www.westerntc.edu/transfer>.
3. Take (or submit) the **placement tests** (COMPASS, ASSET, or ACT) and meet the minimum scores **unless** any of the following apply:
 - If you have a **bachelors or masters degree**, you are not required to take placement tests.
 - If you have successfully completed (C grade or better) college level **Written Communications** or **Beginning Composition**, you are not required to take the **Writing** placement test.
 - If you have successfully completed (C grade or better) **College Mathematics**, you are not required to take the **Math** placement test.

Satisfactory placement scores for the Respiratory Therapist program can be obtained at:
http://www.westerntc.edu/programs/program.aspx?PROGRAM_NBR=105151

Testing is available in La Crosse at the Welcome Center and at the Regional Learning Centers. For more information, visit the assessment website at <http://www.westerntc.edu/admissions/assessment.asp>. If you take a placement test at another location, request that your scores be sent to Western.

Remediation courses are available for you if you do not meet the placement scores for the program. Re-testing is required after remediation. Achievement of minimum placement scores is necessary for admission to the program.

Students in the shared program should talk with counselors at SWTC for information about score requirements and to arrange for testing.

Step 2: Complete Admission Requirements for the Respiratory Therapist Program

1. Complete the **Online Overview**. You are doing this now and are almost done. You must complete the **Intent to Enroll** form when you are prepared to begin your program of choice. Review the form to identify and complete the admission requirements specific to your program. You may send the completed requirements as they are fulfilled to Enrollment Services, located at the Welcome Center. Maintain and fill in the Intent to Enroll form as every requirement is submitted or attach the completed requirement(s) to the form and bring to your appointment.

When all admission requirements are fulfilled, call Enrollment Services (608) 785-9553 to schedule an appointment to review your paperwork with an enrollment services advisor. Bring the Intent to Enroll form to your appointment with any un-submitted documentation. At this appointment, the enrollment services advisor will finalize the admission process and provide you with an estimated start date. At this time, you will sign the second page of the Intent to Enroll form verifying that you have completed the requirements to enter the program and have been assigned an estimated start date.

If you are unable to begin the program on the assigned start date, you will need to resubmit the Intent to Enroll form and schedule another appointment. Students are unable to request a pass on their assigned date. They will be assigned a later start date upon resubmission of the Intent to Enroll form.

2. Meet **reading requirement** as noted in Step I, item 3
3. Meet **math requirement** as noted in Step I, item 3
4. Meet **writing requirement** as noted in Step I, item 3
5. Read and complete the **Essential Functions** for your program. Essential Functions are a listing of the physical, cognitive, and mental abilities that you will need in order to complete the program. You must read the Essential Functions and complete the appropriate section on page two of the Intent to Enroll form. If you have a documented disability, there may be accommodations that can be made to assist in your successful completion of the program. Please contact Disability Services at Western (608 785-9875) if you are in need of more information.

A change in your ability to perform any of the Essential Functions must be reported to Doreen Olson, Associate Dean, (608) 789-4757, or to your instructor immediately.

6. Complete the **Immunization Form**. The immunization information can usually be obtained from your personal physician. **IMPORTANT**: The immunization form **MUST** be signed by a physician, physician assistant, nurse or nurse practitioner.

TB Testing: If you do not have two consecutive years of TB testing, you must have a “two-step” TB test done. A two-step test means have the whole test repeated about 1-2 weeks after the first test. After that, you just need to repeat a single test every 12 months.

TB tests are administered at your local physician’s office, county health department or (for current Western students taking at least 6 credits) at the UWL Health Center in the Health Science Center in La Crosse. You are required to repeat the standard one-step TB test annually until you graduate from the program.

It is your responsibility to submit immunization records, including TB tests, prior to or with the Intent to Enroll form to Enrollment Services located in the Welcome Center so the documentation can be entered into your official health record here at Western.

Hepatitis B Series: It is your choice whether or not to have the series. If you elect to do the Hepatitis B series, you need to *start* the series, but do not have to *complete* the series in order to submit the immunization form. You must submit the remaining dates when the series is complete.

It is strongly recommended that you **maintain a copy** of all forms/verification for your own personal record.

7. Complete the **Background Information Disclosure Form**. The State of Wisconsin requires that individuals who will be working with vulnerable adults and/or children undergo a criminal background check. You must complete the form and submit the \$20.00 fee (made payable to Western Technical College) in order to meet this admission requirement. Western does not accept background checks conducted by third parties (i.e. your employer). You are required to disclose any past experiences with the law. Any arrests or new charges must be reported to the Associate Dean of Health and Public Safety (Doreen Olson) at 608 789-4757 within five (5) working days. Failure to do so may result in program dismissal. In addition, if you have resided outside of Wisconsin in the past 3 years, you will be informed of how to obtain your out-of-state background check at your own expense

Although the form itself refers to crimes, criminal convictions, and pending criminal charges, the information that comes back from the background check does include all contacts with law enforcement whether or not a criminal conviction occurred. Therefore, include contacts such as non-criminal traffic matters, arrests, charges for which you were acquitted, and charges that were pled down to an ordinance violation or forfeiture.

If your background check reveals past experiences with the law, two clinical sites will be contacted to determine the likelihood of your being able to complete a clinical experience at those sites. **Clinical sites have the right to refuse clinical placement to any student based on the background check results. You will be informed of the decision of the clinical sites to assist you in understanding the likelihood of being able to complete the clinical courses for the program.** If you have charges on your background check, we are unable to guarantee that you will be able to be placed for the multiple clinical experiences that most programs require. It is your decision whether or not to enter the program based on the uncertainty of being accepted at clinical sites. See Frequently Asked Questions for more information on the impact of a positive background check.

8. Attain **CPR Certification**: You are required to complete the **American Heart Association Healthcare Provider** certification and provide a copy (front and back) of your card. Note: There are many different levels of CPR; be sure to register for **Healthcare Provider**. You are required to maintain your CPR certification until you graduate. This may mean that you may have to take a renewal class during your time at Western. A listing of CPR courses offered at Western is available at www.westernnc.edu/lifelonglearning.
9. **Biology**: You must successfully complete (C grade or better) biology at a high school and/or college level. If you have not previously taken this course, you can fulfill this requirement by taking it at Western. This requirement must be completed prior to taking General Anatomy and Physiology.
10. **Chemistry**: You must successfully complete (C grade or better) chemistry at a high school and/or college level. If you have not previously taken this course, you can fulfill this requirement by taking it at Western. This requirement must be completed prior to taking General Anatomy and Physiology.
11. **General Anatomy and Physiology**: You must successfully complete (C grade or better) General Anatomy and Physiology (or **BOTH** A&P 1 and A&P 2 - see page 2 of this overview).

Acceptance into the Program

- ✚ The program currently admits 16 students each year.
- ✚ Students will be admitted to this program once the student has completed the **Intent to Enroll** form, met the program requirements and met with an Enrollment Services advisor. Program admission is based upon a first

come, first served basis. Once the program is filled, students will be admitted to the next cohort. If an opening occurs in an earlier cohort, you may be contacted.

In the event that the program is not full, applications will continue to be accepted until 3 weeks prior to the start of the program. Applicants who meet all admission requirements will be accepted on a first come, first served basis until the program is full.

It is to the student's advantage to complete admission requirements for the program as soon as possible.

- ✚ Students are placed on the admission list based on the date they submit the Intent to Enroll form. If something happens and you need to delay starting the program, you'll need to submit a new Intent to Enroll form to be placed on the next list. Position on the new list is based on the date of your new form.
- ✚ **Advanced Standing:** Admission after the start of Respiratory Therapy Survey in spring semester may be considered for students transferring in with a bachelor's degree in biology, if space is available. Program head approval is required.

Frequently Asked Questions



- **What if there is something on my background check?** First of all, it is very important that you be honest when completing the background check form. Some facilities may automatically refuse a student who is perceived to be less than truthful on the form. If a student has a positive background check (meaning that there is something in your background), two clinical sites will be contacted to determine the likelihood of accepting you for a clinical placement. You will be contacted regarding the response of the clinical sites so that you can make a decision as to whether or not to enter the program. Results of the inquiry to the clinical site is not a guarantee of being able to place you at every clinical site but will give you an indication of the likelihood of being able to be placed at some clinical site. It does not guarantee what will actually happen once you are in the program. It is your decision as to whether or not you want to enter the program.

Last Thoughts

- You are responsible to make sure that you keep your contact information (address and phone number) current. Contact Enrollment Services in the Welcome Center to let the college know of any changes or update your information on your MyWestern student account.
- **Activate your student email account and check it routinely.** If you need help with that, ask in the Welcome Center or the Library.
- The admission requirements are subject to change without notice. This website will be updated, at minimum, on October 15 and February 15 of each year.
- Students in health or public safety programs at Western are required to have a C grade or better in all general studies and program courses. Students who have less than a C grade in General Anatomy and Physiology are required to participate in remedial work designed to assist in successful completion when they repeat the course. Please see the student handbook for more information on College and Division policies at <http://www.westernc.edu/currentstudents/>
- Invest in a small file box to store all your academic records. **Keep copies of all the forms you submit, including the immunization form.** It's also a good idea to keep copies of course syllabi in case you decide to continue



your education someday at another college.

- All forms, including CPR certificate, immunization records and TB test results must be submitted to the **Welcome Center**.
- **Plan ahead:** You won't be accepted into the respiratory therapist program until all the requirements have been met. Your position on the list for admission is based on the date you submit the Intent to Enroll form.



To learn more about the program at Western:

- Contact the **faculty**:

Lynn S Lenz
RRT, B.S., M.Ed.
Program Head

Email: LenzL@westernnc.edu
Office: Kumm Building K-203 K
Phone: (608) 789-6049

Kathy Nelson
RRT, B.S.
Clinical Coordinator

Email: NelsonKatherine@westernnc.edu
Office: Kumm Building K-203 L
Phone: 608-785-9421

- Contact one of the **program enrollment services advisors** in the Welcome Center

Deb Kaiser

kaiserd@westernnc.edu

608-785-9078

Sandy Peterson

PetersonS@westernnc.edu

608-785-9207

Stacey Nelson

Nelsons@westernnc.edu

608-785-9842

- **Job shadow** a respiratory therapist at a local hospital. See the next page for information on how to arrange one.

To schedule a job shadow:

- At **Franciscan Skemp**, call the Volunteer Services department at (608) 785-0940 ext 4203.
- At **Gundersen Lutheran**, contact the Human Resources Service Center (608) 775-4743.

You may contact the director of respiratory care at any hospital, explain your request and ask whether they would permit you to job shadow. Most are willing to provide the opportunity to students enrolled in a program. If you live in a rural community and are hoping to work at a local hospital, doing a job shadow there is an excellent introduction. However, you are encouraged to also shadow at a large trauma facility as well to get a clear idea of the expectations of the program.

What is a job shadow?

Visiting a hospital's Respiratory Care Department will help you to learn about the field you are considering. This ***will not*** be a tour of the hospital. You will actually accompany therapists as they treat patients. You will experience the sights and sounds of respiratory care.

What to wear

Hospital patients and visitors view you as part of the hospital staff, so it's important that you **look professional**. That means **no** jeans or t-shirts, short skirts, bare midriffs or bare legs. **No** visible tattoos, no more than one earring per ear and no visible piercings anywhere else. Keep jewelry conservative, nothing that will dangle in the patient's face or get caught in tubes.

You'll spend most of your time dashing around with a respiratory therapist. **Comfortable shoes** with socks or stockings will keep you from limping by the end of the day. **Clothing that covers you adequately** allows you to concentrate on the learning experiences rather than worrying about showing your 'assets' when you bend over or sit down.

What to expect

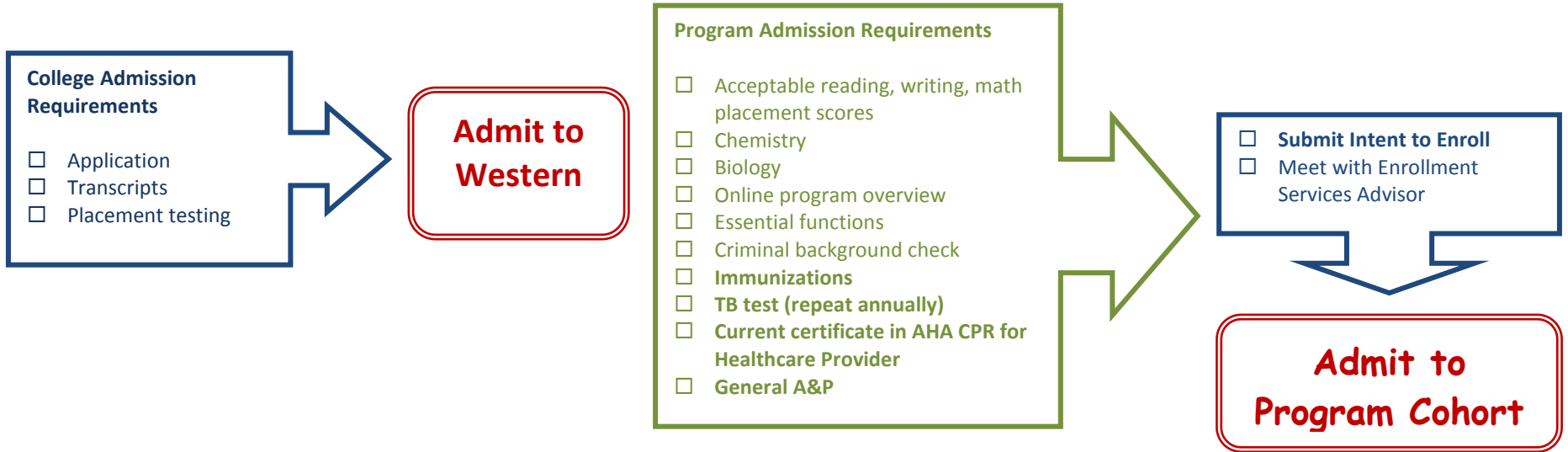
You will watch therapists as they assess and treat various patients in different areas of the hospital. You may see therapists on general hospital floors, intensive care units, in laboratories and nurseries. You will see some of the equipment that respiratory therapists use and you will hear about what it does. **Remember to respect the patient's privacy and act professionally.**

By the way, you'll enjoy your job shadow more if you **eat a healthy meal** before you begin. There will be lots of walking and some standing.

Important words about Confidentiality

Part of the responsibility of health care workers is to keep what they see in the hospital confidential. In exchange for giving you the opportunity to see what the profession is really like, the hospital requires that you maintain the same high degree of confidentiality. This means that you cannot tell patient names or details of their health status to your friends and family. **If you were a patient, how would you want others to handle information they might know about you?**

Respiratory Therapist Program Admission Process



Respiratory Therapist Program Layout

