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Mission and Goals

Mission
The primary mission of the Saint Louis University Physician Assistant Program is to educate men and women to become competent, compassionate physician assistants dedicated to excellence in healthcare and the service of humanity. PAs are educated according to the medical model in a manner that complements the education of the physician. This similarity of instruction and training enhances the working relationship between the PA and the physician.

Goals
The SLU PA Program remains successful in attaining its goals related to the education of PA students, including the following:

- The program seeks to produce graduates who are competent in the knowledge required of a PA program graduate.
- The program seeks to produce graduates who are competent in the skills and abilities necessary for practice as a PA.
- The program seeks to produce graduates who are competent in the attitudes and behaviors imperative for the PA profession.

Measures for evaluating achievement of these goals include excellent patient care and professionalism as assessed by preceptors who evaluate students during clinical rotations, formative and summative faculty assessments of students, a long history of outstanding scores and first-time pass rates on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) and excellent job placement rates.

The competency-based curriculum provides the entry-level graduate with the fundamental knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to function in a variety of roles within numerous clinical disciplines. The program seeks to produce graduates who are competent in the following areas:

Competencies
The graduate should have a working knowledge of each of the following:

- the clinical preparatory and pre-clinical sciences to include the applied behavioral sciences
- the range of expected norms in patients of all ages
- the signs and symptoms of disease and their relationship to one another
- pathophysiology sufficient to identify deviations from the expected norms in patients of all ages
- the norms for psychological and social behaviors and the recognition of deviations from these expected norms
- fundamental health maintenance and patient management regimens
- the problem solving process and how it may be applied to identifying health problems
- the technical and human resources available to the primary health care provider
- the role of the physician assistant within the health care team
- the resources available for continued professional development
Skills
The graduate should acquire the competencies and skills to:

- recognize the signs and symptoms of disease, while understanding their relationship to each other
- obtain, organize and construct a clinical assessment which accurately describes the information available for a given patient at a given time
- develop a problem list from the clinical assessment
- apply problem-solving methods in clinical situations
- manage common health problems with physician supervision
- communicate empathetically and compassionately with patients
- communicate effectively with physicians and other members of the health care team
- competently perform technical procedures

Attitudes
The graduate should embrace and demonstrate the following:

- respect for self, others and the right to privacy as well as respect for the PA profession
- appropriate value judgments with respect to interpersonal relationships with peers, superiors, patients and their families
- recognition of commitment and service to humanity, especially to the patient and the patient's family
- recognition of moral, ethical and legal implications of his or her actions
- recognition of patient and provider rights and restrictions
- appreciation of cultural and value system disparities among varied populations of all socioeconomic levels
- responsibility for maintaining continued clinical and professional competency

Philosophy
The program's general educational philosophy was founded on the premise that experiential learning is the most effective form of learning, and that it can be best achieved within an environment which:

- encourages the participation of the whole person in the learning process
- promotes self-initiated discovery
- influences the learner's behavior and attitudes and has meaning for the learner
- allows the learner to assess the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and attitudes which occur with effective learning

This philosophy of education serves as the foundation of the program's goals and objectives, and in defining the entry-level competencies expected of the graduate physician assistant.
Performance Standards

During the entirety of the PA Program, students are expected to adhere to specific academic and professional standards which are outlined in the Student Handbook and Policy Manual.

The complex nature of medicine and the condensed educational time frame of the PA Program combine to create a curriculum that is very rigorous, time-consuming and intense. Whether engaged in classroom and lab activity, reading and studying, or clinical rotation obligations, students should assume they will be involved in program requirements all day, every day for the duration of the program. It is recommended that students do not work during the 27 months they are enrolled in the program. Additionally, students may not work for the PA program nor serve as instructional faculty or clinical/ administrative staff.

As healthcare professionals, PAs must be sensitive to the value of human dignity. This value is manifested in behaviors and attitudes demonstrating inclusion, sensitivity to the well-being of others and honesty in all endeavors. PA students, therefore, are held to standards of professional behavior in areas including conduct, academics, health information, daily interactions with others, patient encounters, title identification, attire and attendance.

In addition to expectations for professional behavior, PA students must also meet academic standards. The academic expectation is that all PA students maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 and perform at or above 70 percent on exams and other graded components.

As outlined in the Student Handbook and Policy Manual, withdrawal from any course or modification of the curricular sequence of the PA Program is not permitted, except as part of an approved leave of absence. If for any reason a student needs to request a leave of absence, the student should schedule a meeting with the PA Program Director or another principal faculty member. The student will be guided through the University process for LOA and course withdrawal with help from program faculty and staff. Despite potential reasons for leaving the program, most fees are non-refundable and tuition refunds often cannot be granted due to the timing and sequencing of our curriculum. If, however, a tuition refund is applicable, the student will be guided through this process as well. Information on withdrawal, tuition and fee refunds may be found on SLU's Student Financial Aid Services website.
Technical Standards

Students enrolled in the Saint Louis University Physician Assistant Program must be able to complete all requirements leading to the Master of Medical Science degree. This degree signifies that the holder is a clinician prepared for entry into the practice of medicine as a physician assistant, possessing the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to function in a variety of clinical situations and to provide a broad spectrum of care consistent with physician assistant practice.

To achieve success in the program and the profession, individuals must possess certain more specifically defined abilities and skills. Saint Louis University has systems in place to assist any student who has a documented physical, psychological or cognitive disability. SLU is committed to full compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. A student who believes he/she may not be able to perform one or more of the listed essential program requirements should discuss the issue with personnel in the Disability Services (314.977.3838; DuBourg Hall, Room 36, 221 North Grand Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63103-2097). Any student who believes they cannot meet or fulfill any part of the technical standards must contact Disability Services which will document the matter and address reasonable accommodations for the student if warranted.

Students enrolled in the program must have the emotional and intellectual ability to learn, assimilate, analyze and integrate information and data. Motor function capabilities must allow candidates to meet the demands of PA education and patient care. Candidates must be able to develop mature, sensitive, effective relationships with patients and colleagues. They must be able to tolerate physical and emotional stress and a fast-paced academic and clinical environment and continue to function effectively. They must be adaptable, flexible and able to function in the face of uncertainty.

In addition to acquiring the knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and behaviors detailed in the general PA program objectives, the technical standards must be met by each physician assistant student. If students are unable to meet or fulfill the technical standards with or without reasonable accommodation as determined by the Saint Louis University Disability Services their status as a PA student may be affected. The technical standards require that the physician assistant student, with or without reasonable accommodations must demonstrate the ability to:

1. Communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, health professionals, teachers, staff and peers in settings where communication is typically oral or written or when the time span available for communication is limited. Students must be able to understand and convey information, accurately perceive nonverbal communication, and describe findings related to patients.

2. Observe demonstrations and visual adjuncts used in classroom, laboratory and clinical instruction. PA students must be able to observe patients accurately and completely from a distance and at close range.

3. Elicit data from patients via palpation, percussion, and auscultation. These skills and others necessary to carry out a variety of diagnostic maneuvers and therapeutic procedures require coordination of gross and fine muscular movements, equilibrium and sensation.

4. Acquire, assimilate, interpret, integrate and apply information from direct observation, oral communication, written messages, films, slides, microscopes, imaging science, ECG readouts and other material or media.
5. Possess motor function sufficient to execute movements reasonably required to provide general care and emergency treatment to patients, such as those required in physical examination, airway management, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, suturing and assisting in surgery.

6. Perform problem-solving tasks quickly and efficiently in an environment which may change rapidly, without warning or in unpredictable ways. Such tasks require not only intellectual-conceptual, integrative and quantitative abilities, but also the ability to comprehend three-dimensional and spatial relationships.

7. Exercise sound judgment and perform all tasks related to the care of patients in a responsible and professional manner.

8. Carry out procedures involved in learning the sciences fundamental to medicine. This includes the ability to participate fully in curricular activities and requirements in the classroom, laboratory and clinical setting. It also may include performing physical exams on a classmate.
Certification and Licensure

PAs are certified nationally and licensed by state. After graduation from an ARC-PA accredited PA program, physician assistants can sit for the national certification exam, the PANCE (Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam). The PANCE is administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) which is the nationally recognized certification organization for physician assistants. The NCCPA assures high standards in the profession, provides the consumer with safeguards and the physician employer with evidence of competency. Saint Louis University Physician Assistant Program graduates have consistently performed above the national average on the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE).

National certification via the NCCPA is required for clinical practice as a PA. Certified physician assistants are also required to demonstrate continued competency via mandatory continuing education every two years and successful completion of the national PA recertification exam every ten years.

State licensure is also required for clinical practice as a PA. Specific requirements for licensure vary by state but national certification as a PA is mandatory for any state licensure. Depending on state-specific requirements, the supervisory agreement between the PA and his or her supervising physician (MD or DO) may be maintained with state licensure documents.

Note: Many state regulatory and governing organizations will not grant a license, registration or other professional practice document if one has been convicted of a felony, or in some cases, a misdemeanor. Prospective applicants are encouraged to consult with the state licensing organization for more detailed information before applying.
Selection Factors

The Committee on Admissions will select students for the Program based on the overall strength of the applicant relative to the applicant pool. The following areas are of primary consideration:

- Academic potential as demonstrated by prior coursework
- Motivation for and familiarity with the role of the PA in health care and society
- Quality and duration of prior health care experience
- Maturity
- Ability to make sound professional and personal judgments
- Compassion and empathy
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral and written communications skills
- Capacity for performance of the technical standards required of a PA
- Alignment with the mission of the SLU PA Program
- Potential for success in the SLU Program and in the PA profession
Additional Requirements

1. In keeping with our Jesuit values and program mission, SLU PA students are required to complete community service hours during their time in the program. Required service hours at the PA student-operated free clinic, the HRC (Health Resource Center) can count towards this.

2. Admitted Physician Assistant students must meet certain health, immunization and related requirements prior to and during their matriculation.

3. Students are required to obtain a criminal background check and undergo drug testing through Saint Louis University just after matriculation and again before clinical rotations begin. A positive background check or drug screen could of serious consequences for the student including forfeiture of any or all clinical rotations and/or inability to complete the program. The potential to sit for the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) may also be impacted. Additionally, many state regulatory and governing organizations will not grant a license, registration or other similar professional practice document if there is a positive criminal background check or drug screen.