

Physician Assistant Education

Doisy College of Health Sciences



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY



DOISY COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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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.

Program Competencies

Students matriculating in the SLU PA Program undertake a difficult, rewarding and life-changing journey. The program has high expectations of its students and the students are expected to live up to the challenge. Along the way as students and afterwards as health care providers, there is great responsibility placed upon them.

The SLU PA student competencies help prepare them for this responsibility. SLU's original competencies, documented many years ago, have served the program well and were reviewed and revised in 2016-2017 to better align with the national competencies for practicing PAs. These national PA competencies were devised collaboratively by the four national PA organizations - Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA), American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) and the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).

Students are expected to work toward attainment of the program competencies as they progress through the curriculum. And certain patterns and/or levels of attainment are expected along the course of the didactic and clinical phases of the program. Aligned with the national PA competencies, our student competencies include six major components - Medical Knowledge, Interpersonal and Communication Skills, Patient Care, Professionalism, Practice-Based Learning and Improvement, and Systems-Based Practice. Each of these has multiple subcomponents correlating to specific competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required of our PA students. These can be mapped to our curriculum and with various assessment tools in place we can track competency attainment for each student.

The competencies are interwoven with and complementary to our program goals, learning outcomes, and instructional objectives and are fundamental to the curricular and operational framework of our program.

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.

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, clinical compliance, 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.

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.

Withdrawal and Leave of Absence

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.

Achievement of Program Goals

The SLU PA Program has a long and rich history of excellence in didactic and clinical PA education. There are five overarching goals which impact each other, interact within the context of the program mission, and broadly capture many of the details and components that come together to create the curricular and operational framework of our program. Program competencies, learning outcomes and instructional objectives are interwoven as part of the support for this framework.

The five program goals are:

- 1) Prepare students to practice patient-centered medicine as graduate PAs.
- 2) Foster intellectual curiosity in order to graduate PAs who are committed to lifelong learning, evidence-based medical practice, and continuous improvement in the practice of medicine and the delivery of patient care.
- 3) Cultivate an environment that expects and encourages respect for others and outstanding professionalism.
- 4) Provide a rigorous and supportive educational environment to attain a respectable first time PANCE pass rate.
- 5) Promote Jesuit Values to prepare students to serve their community and patients in the spirit of *cura personalis*.

We have various assessment tools and benchmarks in place to determine whether we are successfully meeting program goals. Information about achievement of our SLU PA Program goals is outlined below.

Program Goal #1

Prepare students to practice patient-centered medicine as graduate PAs

1. Learning outcomes within this goal include interpersonal and communication skills as well as patient care. Specific parameters within these include skills resulting in effective information exchange with patients, their families, physicians, professional associates and others within the health care system as well as effective, safe, high quality patient care that is equitable in various settings and for various populations.
2. As evidenced via assessment tools like OSCEs, the End-of-Program Survey and the Graduate Survey, the program has been successful in meeting Goal #1. Some examples of outcomes demonstrating this success are listed below.
 - A. With respect to interpersonal and communication skills,
 - 71% of recent graduates strongly agree and 29% agree that the didactic phase of the program prepared them for presenting patients orally in the clinical phase of the program.
 - For the five most recent cohorts completing the Graduate Survey, 61% strongly agree and 32% agree that the program prepared them for the

documentation of patient encounters required as a practicing PA. Also, 84% agree or strongly that the program prepared them for the oral patient presentations required for their practice as a PA.

B. With respect to patient care,

- 90% of recent graduates strongly agree that the Didactic Phase (Phase I) prepared them to take patient histories and perform physical exam skills. 65% strongly agreed that Phase I prepared them to form a differential diagnosis and patient assessment & plan, and 76% felt that Clinical Phase (Phase II) allowed them to learn about many different patients and disease processes. 100% of recent graduates either agree or strongly agree that they were able to provide medical care to patients from diverse populations in Phase II.
- For the five most recent cohorts completing the Graduate Survey 87% agree or strongly agree that the program prepared them to work collaboratively with health professionals from various disciplines to provide optimal patient care.
- Additionally, 95% either agree or strongly agree that they were prepared to take a history upon graduation, 94% either agree or strongly agree that they were prepared to do a physical exam, and 89% either agree or strongly agree that they were able to develop a differential diagnosis.

Program Goal #2

Foster intellectual curiosity in order to graduate PAs who are committed to lifelong learning, evidence-based medical practice, and continuous improvement in the practice of medicine and the delivery of patient care

1. Learning outcomes within Goal #2 include practice-based learning and improvement as well as systems-based practice. Specific parameters within these include critical thinking skills allowing students to investigate and analyze clinical situations in order to evaluate and improve patient care within a fiduciary context as well as an awareness and responsiveness to the larger system of health care in order to provide patient care that balances quality and cost with prioritization of the patient.
2. As evidenced via assessment tools like professional development assessments (PDAs), preceptor-completed student evaluations, OSCEs and the Graduate Survey, the program has been successful in meeting Goal #2. Some examples of outcomes demonstrating this success are listed below.

A. With respect to improving patient care within a fiduciary context,

- 94% of the most recent graduating cohort felt the PA program helped them gain awareness of the larger system of health care and gain critical thinking skills necessary to improve patient care in a cost-conscious manner.

- B. With respect to awareness and responsiveness to the larger system of health care,
- 95% of the five most recent cohorts completing the graduate survey felt they understood the concept of systems-based practice and
 - 91% felt they understood the concept of practice-based learning and improvement.

Program Goal #3

Cultivate an environment that expects and encourages respect for others and outstanding professionalism

1. The primary learning outcome within Goal #3 is professionalism and specific parameters include a high level of professional behavior and conduct that results in responsible ethical practice, sensitivity to a diverse patient population and work environment and adherence to legal and regulatory requirements.
2. As evidenced via assessment tools like preceptor-completed student evaluations, professional development assessments (PDAs) and OSCEs, and the Graduate Survey, the program has been successful in meeting Goal #3. Some examples of outcomes demonstrating this success are listed below.
 - A. With respect to PDAs which provide a glimpse into student perspectives of their own professionalism,
 - 97% of students from the Classes of 2016 and 2017 agreed or strongly agreed that they demonstrated a high level of professionalism regarding attendance, punctuality, reliability, attire and personal appearance.
 - 100% of graduates from the Class of 2016 either agree or strongly agree that they have a high level of professionalism regarding being respectful, polite, non-discriminatory, and protecting confidentiality of patients.
 - 92% of the Class of 2017 either agree or strongly agree that they are very professional in their attire and personal appearance. 95% agree or strongly agree that they are very respectful, courteous and polite and protect patient confidentiality. 97% agree or strongly agree that they are collegial and non-discriminatory towards fellow students.
 - B. With respect to other perspectives on professionalism,
 - For the most recent graduating cohort, the professionalism component of Preceptor-Completed Evaluations (PCEs) for students in Phase II reveals an overall average of 96.7% for all professionalism components (Interest and Initiative; Reliability, Dependability and Maturity, Punctuality and Appearance; Recognition of Personal Limitations; Interpersonal Skills; Sensitivity to Diversity; Interprofessional Interaction).
 - The for cohort currently in the midst of Phase II, the professionalism component of the PCEs reveals an overall average of 98.3% for the same eight professionalism components.

- Of the five most recent cohorts completing the graduate survey, 21% agree and 65% strongly agree that the SLU PA Program prepared them to understand professionalism and the importance of professional behavior.

Program Goal 4

Provide a rigorous and supportive educational environment to attain a respectable first time PANCE pass rate.

1. The primary learning outcome within Goal #4 is medical knowledge and specific parameters include core knowledge about medicine and the application of this to patient care in varying clinical situations and in different patient populations.
2. As evidenced via assessments like the End-of-Program Survey, the Graduate Survey, PACKRAT scores, Phase II End-of-Rotation Exams (EOREs), and PANCE results, the program has been successful in meeting Goal #4. Some examples of outcomes demonstrating this success are listed below.
 - A. With respect to medical knowledge as well as its application to patient care,
 - Of the five most recent cohorts completing the Graduate Survey 90% agree or strongly agree that the program helped prepare them to counsel patients regarding health promotion and disease prevention and
 - 72% of graduates agree or strongly agree that they are prepared to order and interpret appropriate labs and diagnostics.
 - The average first-time PANCE pass rate since 2001 is 97.94%
 - B. With respect to medical knowledge applied to patient care in varying clinical situations and in different patient populations,
 - 94% of graduates from the Classes of 2015 and 2016 agree or strongly agree that the didactic phase of the program prepared them to understand the scientific basis of medicine that is essential to building the foundation of clinical medicine and
 - 100% of recent graduates either agree or strongly that they were able to provide medical care to patients from diverse populations in Phase II.

Program Goal 5

Promote Jesuit Values to prepare students to serve their community and patients in the spirit of *cura personalis* (or "care for the entire person" - respect for the dignity of each person, mind, body and soul, to include respect for the unique strengths and gifts of others as well as the unique cultural, physical, psychological, spiritual and socioeconomic circumstances of others).

1. The primary learning outcome within Goal #5 is Jesuit Values and the alignment of our program mission and specific parameters including access to opportunities for increasing student understanding and application of Jesuit education principles and values.
2. As evidenced via assessments like Professional Development Assessments (PDAs) and End-of-Program Survey, the program has been successful in meeting Goal #5. Some examples of outcomes demonstrating this success are listed below.
 - A. With respect to increasing student understanding of Jesuit principles and values,

- Recent PDAs reveal that 92% of the class of 2016 and 72% of the Class of 2017 either agree or strongly agree that they have a strong understanding of Ignatian values and Jesuit principles.
 - The End-of-Program Survey revealed that 91% of Class of 2015 and Class of 2016 graduates agree or strongly agree that the program did a good job responding to students and modeling *cura personalis*, living up to the program mission and helping students understand Ignatian values.
- B. With respect to opportunities for students to understand and apply these values,
- 85% of the two recent graduating cohorts feel the program did an outstanding or good to very good job of providing opportunity for community service, and
 - 97% feel the program helped them understand and practice Ignatian/Jesuit values (like the acquisition of knowledge for the good of others, etc.)