

Program Review

Executive Summary

Physician Assistant

Majors Reviewed:

- *Bachelor of Physician Assistant (BPA)*

April 2016



The Physician Assistant (BPA) major was established in 1996 and graduated its first Bachelor of Science degree class in 1998. The in-program BPA curriculum is 24 months in length with the didactic year comprising the first 12 months and the clinical year completing the final 12 months. The maximum class size is 30, as mandated by the accrediting body, the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). In 2003, the PA program developed an articulation with Nova Southeastern University to offer a master's degree in Health Sciences via distance learning. Nova Southeastern University offers students in Penn College's PA program a tuition reduction and accepts six of the BPA credits towards their master's degree. Following its most recent site visit in 2006, the PA program was awarded continued accreditation. The next accreditation site visit is scheduled for June 29, 2017.

In February 2016, Penn College's Board of Directors granted approval to proceed with a proposal for the PA Program to offer a graduate degree. The Accreditation Standards for Physician Assistant, 4th edition, require that all currently accredited programs confer graduate degrees to those students who matriculate (enroll) into the program after 2020 and successfully complete the program requirements.

The applicant pool for the Physician Assistant major continues to be robust, providing more applicants than available seats. Students begin as pre-physician assistant majors and complete defined pre-requisites (pre-professional courses) before being considered for the admissions ranking process, with the exception of those freshman students who have been awarded a conditionally reserved seat in the PA major. The program utilizes a point-based admissions ranking system. Transfer students are also considered pre-physician assistant students until prerequisites are completed, at which time, these students may also be ranked for selection into the major.

According to *Business Insider*, Physician Assistant is ranked the number one job in America. The profession has also been ranked in the top ten by *U.S. News & World Report*. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that employment of physician assistants is expected to increase 30 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for all occupations.

Recommendations:

- Gain approval from the Penn College Board of Directors to confer master's degrees to Physician Assistant graduates to meet ARC-PA standards on or before 2020.
- Revise all Physician Assistant (PHA) course abstracts and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) as well as the PA program goals to be more specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, and timely.
- Implement a remediation program for senior students who score below average on the Physician Assistant Clinical Knowledge Rating Assessment Tool (PACKRAT) #1 exam. The program has been discussing plans for organ system and task area remediation during clinical year as well as the utilization of Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) End of Rotation (EOR) exams, which would allow for comparison of Penn College students' clinical rotation performance to national averages.
- Explore and expand clinical site opportunities for all internships, including internal medicine, family practice, pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, psychiatry, emergency room, surgery, and primary care.
- Increase involvement and develop a stronger relationship with advisory committee members and also update its membership.