



Physician Assistant

College of Science & Health

Physician assistants (PAs) are health professionals licensed to practice medicine with the supervision of a physician. Physician assistants work in a variety of practice settings including hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and research centers. PAs are qualified to take medical histories, examine patients, order and administer tests, make diagnoses, treat illnesses, and assist in surgery. They are trained to provide care that otherwise would be administered by a physician. Physician assistants can provide care as generalists in primary care situations, or in subspecialty areas of medicine. Common specialties in which PAs practice include family practice, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, surgery, and pediatrics.



Physician Assistant Program

Graduate Program

Master of Science

- Physician Assistant

Program Features

PA Program Partnership and Mission Statement

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, in partnership with the Gundersen Lutheran Medical Foundation of La Crosse and the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, School of Health Sciences of Rochester, MN, established a physician assistant educational program with the first class graduating in 1997 with BS degrees. In 2003, the PA Program transitioned to the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies.

Mission Statement

The mission of the program is to educate highly competent and compassionate physician assistants who excel in meeting the healthcare needs of the regions served by the partner institutions.

Vision Statement

The program will continue to be a nationally recognized program by:

- Selecting students with the academic background, interpersonal skills and maturity necessary to be outstanding physician assistants
- Educating students who will excel in improving the health and wellness of patients through the supervised practice of medicine
- Developing students who are grounded in professional ethics, cultural sensitivity, and the use of evidence based medicine.

Program Accreditation and PANCE Scores

Physician assistant educational programs are accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission for Physician Assistant Education (ARC-PA). The PA Program was accredited in April of 1997 and granted continuing accreditation in 2000 and in 2003. The last ARC-PA site visit was April 2010 at which time the program was granted full accreditation for seven years, which is the maximum allowed by the ARC-PA. The program will next go up for review in 2017. This

accreditation allows program graduates to sit for the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) administered by the National Commission on Certification of PAs (NCCPA). Graduates' average scores on the PANCE examination have consistently placed the program in the top 20 percent nationally, the top 10 percent in five of the past seven years, and the top five percent for the past two years.

Curriculum

The curriculum is 24-months in length including a 12-month Preclinical Phase consisting primarily of classroom and laboratory activities. A subsequent 12-month Clinical Phase involves rotations in a variety of clinical specialties including surgery, family medicine, obstetrics/gynecology, internal medicine and pediatrics. These clinical experiences are provided at Mayo Clinic sites and Gundersen Lutheran sites in Wisconsin, Minnesota and northern Iowa.

Admission

The rigor and intensity of the program, and the level of skills and responsibility necessary for practice as a physician assistant, require the program to accept candidates who have demonstrated a strong academic background, along with excellent interpersonal skills and maturity. Prior health-care experience is also an indicator of a career commitment suitable to clinical practice. The program's admission process considers each applicant's strengths, and selects for admission those best qualified to meet the program's mission. Application to the Physician Assistant Program is competitive with a class of 19 students admitted annually from an applicant pool of greater than 300. All students admitted to the graduate level program will already hold a baccalaureate degree and are expected to have some health care experience. Students are granted an interview based on cumulative GPA, science GPA and GRE scores. Factors considered during the interview include the following: academic preparation, interpersonal skills, health care experience, knowledge of the PA profession, background predictive of potential for future practice in the service areas of the program's partner institutions, and letters of recommendation.

Academic Prerequisites

At the time of application candidates must have the prerequisites completed, or be able to demonstrate a plan to complete the prerequisites prior to enrollment in the program. These prerequisites include completion of a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college; specific courses that include: at least four semesters of biology, three semesters of chemistry, two semesters of math, and one semester psychology; and a cumulative GPA and a science GPA of not less than 3.00. Submission of GRE scores is required. Specific details of the courses required and the program's technical standards of performance will be found on the program's Web page or in the program brochure.

Health Care Experience

Prior patient care experience is expected as an indicator of a candidate's interpersonal skills, maturity, and suitability for clinical practice. Such experience provides evidence of a career commitment to health care as a physician assistant. Though the program does not require a prerequisite length of prior health care experience, the length, quality, and mix of professional and volunteer experience is a definite consideration in the admission process. A clear understanding of the role of the PA in the health care system is also required.

Employment Outlook

In 1973 there were fewer than 1,500 practicing PAs. Today there are about 77,000 PAs working across the United States. With the Department of Labor projecting a 39 percent increase in the number of jobs available for PAs between 2008 and 2018, the job market for PAs is very strong. This will especially be true in rural and inner city areas. According to the AAPA 2009 Physician Assistant Census, the median starting salary for a physician assistant was \$77,500 and the median salary for all physician assistants was \$87,500.

Health Science Center

The PA Program Office is located in the La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium's Health Science Center (HSC) adjacent to the UW-L campus. Many PA program classes and laboratories use the HSC, which provides state-of-the-art classrooms, laboratories and offices and allows collaboration with the other health professional programs in the facility. The Consortium consists of the following La Crosse institutions: Mayo Clinic Health System-Franciscan Healthcare, Gundersen Lutheran, Viterbo University, Western Technical College and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Additional information about the HSC and the Consortium can be found at: www.lacrosseconsortium.org

Additional Information

Further detailed information about the program can be found on the program's Web page: www.uwlax.edu/pastudies or by contacting the program's UW-L office in 4033 Health Science Center where the number is (608) 785-6622.

Professional Organization

The national PA professional organization is known as the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA). Additional information about the profession can be obtained from their Web site at www.aapa.org or by calling (703) 836-2272.

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