Department Overview

Physician assistants (PAs) are nationally certified and state-licensed medical professionals who practice on healthcare teams with physicians and other providers. 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.

Graduate Program

Master of Science

• Physician Assistant

Professional Associations

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 website at www.aapa.org or by calling 703.836.2272.

Program Features

PA PROGRAM PARTNERSHIP AND MISSION STATEMENT

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, in partnership with the Gundersen Medical Foundation of La Crosse and the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, School of Health Sciences of Rochester, Minn., established a physician assistant educational program with the first class graduating in 1997 with B.S. degrees. In 2003, the PA Program transitioned to the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies. Marshfield Clinic joined the programmatic partnership in 2017.

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

View degree requirements: www.uwlax.edu/catalog
Program Features

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, 2003, 2010 and 2017. The last ARC-PA site visit was February 2017 at which time the program was granted full accreditation for ten years, which is the maximum allowed by the ARC-PA. The program will next go up for review in 2027. 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).

The first time pass rate on the PANCE for our five most recent graduating classes have been 100 percent. In addition, our classes have scored at or above the national average on subscores of the PANCE.

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 website 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 115,000 PAs working across the United States. With the Department of Labor projecting a 38 percent increase in the number of jobs available for PAs between 2013 and 2022, the job market for PAs is very strong. This will especially be true in rural and inner city areas. According to the 2013 Annual Survey Report, the median starting salary for a physician assistant was $100,000.

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 UWL 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 Medical Foundation, 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.