

Success of the South College Physician Assistant Program (Knoxville, TN) in Achieving its Goals

Goals

The South College Physician Assistant (PA) program has six primary goals that are designed to achieve our mission and vision for educating the next generation of highly qualified physician assistants.

1. Evaluate and select highly qualified applicants for admission into the program.

Student Preparedness for the South College Physician Assistant Program, Classes of 2017-2020.					
Student Preparedness	Class of 2017	Class of 2018	Class of 2019	Class of 2020	National average*
Undergraduate GPA	3.50	3.55	3.51	3.58	3.6
GRE scores (V/Q/A)	154/152/3.9	155/153/4.1	155/154/4.0	155/154/4.1	154/153/4.1
Patient Care Experience (hours)	2,366	1,955	1,501	1,794	3,020
PA Program Graduation Rate	97.6%	92.9%	97.6%	TBD	92.9%

*Averages for PA students nationally (Physician Assistant Education Association, *By the Numbers: Program Report 34: Data from the 2018 Program Survey*, Washington, DC: PAEA; 2019). The South College benchmark is to be comparable to the national averages.

TBD – to be determined. Students in the Class of 2020 will graduate in December 2020.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program selects highly qualified applicants for admission into the program based on comparisons of undergraduate GPAs, GRE scores, patient care experiences, and South College PA program graduation rates with national averages.

2. Provide students with a rigorous didactic curriculum that promotes lifelong learning skills and prepares them for clinical rotations.

The South College PA program is 27 months in length, which starts with a 15-month didactic phase and continues with a 12-month supervised clinical learning phase. The curriculum is divided into nine quarters that are each approximately 11 weeks in length.

The didactic curriculum is sequenced to provide a baseline of normal gross anatomy, neuroanatomy, physiology, and health assessment and physical examination in the first quarter. Clinical assessment courses, pharmacotherapeutic courses, and behavioral and social science courses are sequenced throughout the five didactic quarters.

The didactic phase includes a variety of learning strategies combining formal lectures, case-based learning, practical hands-on clinical laboratory classes, clinical simulation assessment, objective structured clinical examinations, and objective structured long examination records, with a continuous focus on competency-based clinical skills. Students also develop strong patient communication skills and advanced critical-thinking problem-solving clinical skills. The didactic curriculum focuses on clinical preparatory sciences, professional issues, and basic medical sciences that sequence information between courses, enabling each student to develop the competencies necessary for transition into the supervised clinical learning phase.

The PA program promotes life-long learning skills and the appropriate use of the medical literature in the Evidence Based Medicine, Research Design and Methodology, and Capstone Research Project courses. The Capstone Research Project requires each student to apply specific knowledge and skills acquired in the structured competency-based PA curriculum to a specific research or practical clinical experience oriented project.

At the culmination of the didactic phase, the Didactic Summative Evaluation (DSE) course focuses on assessment of student history taking and physical examination skills, as well as communication and clinical reasoning ability, the ability to summarize and document clinical encounter findings, and demonstration of psychomotor and critical-thinking skills. Each student must score at least 80% in the DSE course to progress to the clinical learning year.

Student Self-Assessment of Level of Competence with Skills Taught in the PA Program, South College Physician Assistant Classes of 2017-2019.*			
Area Assessed	Class of 2017	Class of 2018	Class of 2019
Obtain a detailed and accurate medical history	4.78	4.72	4.85
Perform a comprehensive physical examination	4.72	4.72	4.46
Develop a preliminary diagnosis and a secondary problem list	4.30	4.36	4.23
Identify, order, and interpret diagnostic tests	3.88	3.96	4.08
Accurately record, organize, and utilize the medical record	4.33	4.24	4.00
Access and analyze patient history	4.56	4.56	4.54
Formulate and implement treatment plans	4.13	4.20	4.00
Recognize and manage life-threatening emergencies	4.03	4.08	3.92
Identify and perform procedures common to primary care	4.28	4.28	4.15
Make appropriate referrals to specialists	4.45	4.40	4.62
Consult with a physician in situations beyond the PA's scope of expertise	4.55	4.44	4.31
Demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills as a health care professional	4.60	4.64	4.46
Interact with patients respecting cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences	4.47	4.64	4.69
Counsel and educate patient regarding health promotion, disease prevention, and health risk interventions	4.58	4.36	4.54
Counsel, evaluate, and refer for psychosocial problems	4.17	4.28	4.15
Understand and integrate the principals of information technology and evidence based medicine into clinical practice	4.50	4.28	4.31
Promote life-long learning with appropriate use of medical literature	4.65	4.24	4.38
Understand the role of the Physician Assistant in the health care team	4.78	4.56	4.77

*Shown is the average score for each area of student self-assessment based on a Likert scale (1=Inadequate, 2=Improvement Needed, 3=Average, 4=Good, 5=Excellent). The South College benchmark is for students to score themselves equal to or greater than 4.0 in all areas.

Preceptor Feedback of Student Preparedness for Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences, South College Physician Assistant Classes of 2017-2019.*			
Area Assessed	Class of 2017	Class of 2018	Class of 2019
Medical Interview	4.65	4.48	4.58
Physical Examination	4.49	4.48	4.55
Oral Case Presentation	4.51	4.47	4.69
Written Patient Record	4.48	4.67	4.70
Knowledge of Diagnostic Studies	4.37	4.37	4.48
Ability to Perform Clinical Procedures	4.54	4.46	4.55
Problem-solving/Critical Thinking	4.50	4.49	4.60
Factual Knowledge & Concepts	4.44	4.56	4.54
Assessment/Differential Diagnosis	4.52	4.36	4.51
Ability to Form Management Plan	4.46	4.43	4.49
Ability to Implement Management Plan	4.51	4.45	4.63
Relating to Colleagues	4.66	4.87	4.83
Relating to Patients	4.67	4.86	4.85
Understanding Role of PA	4.63	4.83	4.88
Self-confidence	4.65	4.58	4.65
Reliability and Dependability	4.88	4.87	4.93
Professionalism	4.71	4.76	4.83

*Clinical preceptors evaluated all students at the end of their first clinical rotation. Shown is the average score for each area assessed for all rotation courses collectively based on a Likert scale (1=Unsatisfactory, 2=Needs Improvement, 3=Average, 4=Above Average, 5=Excellent). The South College benchmark is for students to score equal to or greater than 4.0 in all areas.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program prepares each student well for supervised clinical practice experiences (rotations) based on the breadth and depth of medical education provided in the curriculum, on student self-assessments of skills, and on preceptor assessments of student skills at the end of the first clinical rotation.

3. Provide students with a comprehensive clinical curriculum that prepares them to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam and become competent, compassionate, and comprehensive health care providers.

The clinical learning phase consists of eight supervised clinical practice experiences, each six weeks in length, in which each student applies knowledge obtained in the didactic phase and acquires essential, hands-on medical skills in preparation for transition into their professional career. This phase involves clinical rotations in a variety of in-patient and out-patient settings and specialties. Each student returns to South College at the end of every clinical rotation and demonstrates acquisition of knowledge and skills through end-of-rotation exams.

The Clinical Summative Review course is comprehensive in nature and designed to ensure that each student has met defined program objectives for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes suitable for clinical practice. It includes a multi-system approach to assessing patients, the ability to summarize and document findings, and to make differential diagnoses and treatment plans. The Clinical Summative Review course also includes specific clinical skills stations to evaluate each student's psychomotor skills.

The PA program’s curriculum is a process of striving for educational excellence and offering students the most current, best-practice, evidence-based medical knowledge. The program has a process of continual assessment of the curriculum to meet this objective, and to implement revisions based on feedback from principal faculty, course directors, adjunct faculty, students, clinical preceptors, medical directors, and advisory committee members.

Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) Pass Rates and Employment Rates for the South College Physician Assistant Classes of 2015-2019.					
Areas Assessed	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
South College first-time takers pass rate	96%	96%	100%	96%	94%
National first-time takers pass rate	96%	96%	97%	93%	93%
South College all takers pass rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%
National all takers pass rate	96%	96%	98%	99%	97%
Number of South College students tested	72	80	83	78	83
Number of national students tested	7784	8082	8732	9220	9774
Employment rate of South College graduates*	99%	100%	100%	100%	TBD

*Percent of students who passed the PANCE and gained employment as a PA-C.

TBD – to be determined. Employment data are still being gathered for the Class of 2019.

The South College benchmarks are to have a first-time takers PANCE pass rate that is equal to or greater than the national rate, and for 100% of graduates who pass the PANCE to be employed as a PA-C.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program provides each student with a comprehensive clinical curriculum that prepares them to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam and become a competent, compassionate, and comprehensive health care provider.

4. Prepare students to make significant contributions in the communities that they serve, foster their ability to improve patient care practices, and promote the PA profession.

Community service allows South College Physician Assistant students to improve patient care practices and promote the PA profession. Community service focuses on personal and civic responsibility. The South College Physician Assistant program embraces community service in medically underserved and economically disadvantaged populations. Community service programs involve PA students in activities that address local needs while promoting their lifelong learning skills and professional development.

Student Community Service Hours for the South College Physician Assistant Classes of 2016-2019.				
Community Service Hours	Class of 2016	Class of 2017	Class of 2018	Class of 2019
Average	44.2	46.0	55.1	53.8
Minimum	40.0	40.0	50.0	50.0
Maximum	115.0	189.0	123.0	90.0

The benchmark was for all students to serve a minimum of 40 hours of community service, which was increased to 50 hours beginning with the Class of 2018.

Membership in the Tennessee Academy of Physician Assistants and the American Academy of Physician Assistants permits South College PA students to participate in student-specific programming at local and national conferences, to network with other PA students and practicing PAs, and to receive career counseling and advice.

Student Membership in Professional Organizations for the South College Physician Assistant Classes of 2016-2019.				
Professional Organization	Class of 2016	Class of 2017	Class of 2018	Class of 2019
Tennessee Academy of Physician Assistants (TAPA)	100%	100%	100%	100%
American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)	100%	100%	100%	100%

The benchmark is for 100% of students to be members of TAPA and AAPA.

The mission of the South College Master of Health Science Physician Assistant Program is to educate highly qualified physician assistants, preparing them to become competent, compassionate, and comprehensive health care providers for clinical practice in rural and urban areas, focusing on underserved communities. In concert with this mission, many of the program’s graduates practice medicine in medically underserved primary care clinical sites, as defined by the Health Resources & Services Administration.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program provides each student with community service opportunities, memberships in professional organizations, and high employment rates (see goal 3) that prepare them to make significant contributions in the communities that they serve, foster their ability to improve patient care practices, and promote the PA profession, with a focus on underserved communities.

5. Recruit and select highly qualified faculty to provide innovative education and training of students, and ongoing assessment and improvement of the program.

The average student to faculty ratio (SFR) for all PA programs in the United States is 15.3 (Physician Assistant Education Association, *By the Numbers: Program Report 34: Data from the 2018 Program Survey*, Washington, DC: PAEA; 2019). The South College PA program works to be comparable. The South College PA program has 17.5 FTE of core faculty, which includes the Program Director (1.0 FTE), Medical Director (0.5 FTE), and 16.0 FTEs of principal faculty. The size of each cohort is 85 students. The SFR is calculated annually during the Fall quarter of each year when the program has three concurrent cohorts of students (255 students). The SFR of the South College PA program is 14.6 (255/17.5). The program SFR (14.6) is comparable to the national SFR (15.3), which meets the program’s benchmark.

The program focuses on having sufficient content area experts required to teach the depth and breadth of material in the curriculum. The principal faculty members have expertise in a broad range of subjects including, but not limited to, family medicine, women's health, internal medicine, emergency medicine, military medicine, geriatrics, dermatology, endocrinology, anesthesiology, general surgery, orthopedics, behavioral medicine, anatomy, genetics, and research. In addition to the 17.5 FTE of core faculty, the PA program has an outstanding group of medical professionals (MDs, DOs, PAs, and NPs) in the community who complement the knowledge base of the principal faculty. The program uses approximately 30-40 instructional faculty members per quarter, both as lecturers in the classroom and as proctors for small group, hands-on, clinical laboratory experiences.

The PA program has six administrative and technical support staff members (6.0 FTEs) to assist the faculty in accomplishing their assigned tasks. All six individuals are assigned to the PA program on a full-time basis.

Supervised clinical practice experiences (rotations) occur with physicians who are specialty board certified in their area of instruction, and with PAs who are teamed with physicians who are specialty board certified in their area of instruction. The PA program has 381 active clinical sites with a total of 1958 rotations in internal medicine, general surgery, family medicine/geriatrics, emergency medicine, women's health, pediatrics, clinical psychiatry and behavioral health, and elective disciplines.

In addition to these PA program personnel, and the instructional faculty and clinical preceptors from the medical community, the program has the support of South College's administrative staff, academic support and student services staff, business office staff, financial aid staff, and library staff.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program faculty and staff are sufficient in number and qualified by licensure and experience to provide innovative education and training of students, and ongoing assessment and improvement of the program.

6. Maintain program accreditation from the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) through a process of continuous program self-assessment.

The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) has granted Accreditation-Continued status to the South College Master of Health Science Physician Assistant Program sponsored by South College. Accreditation-Continued is an accreditation status granted when a currently accredited program is in compliance with the ARC-PA *Standards*.

Accreditation remains in effect until the program closes or withdraws from the accreditation process or until accreditation is withdrawn for failure to comply with the *Standards*. The approximate date for the next validation review of the program by the ARC-PA will be September 2027. The review date is contingent upon continued compliance with the Accreditation *Standards* and ARC-PA policy.

While accreditation is considered a voluntary process, graduation from an ARC-PA accredited program is a requirement to be eligible to sit for the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA), to obtain a state license, and to practice as a physician assistant in the United States.