

## **UCC Program Review Committee Summary of Review**

**Program:** Physician Assistant Practice

**Date of last review:** N/A

**Date of this review:** AY 2021-2022

The program offers the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- Master's in Physician Assistant Practice (MPAP)

**Recommendation:** This program is found to be viable.

See report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

The report was forwarded to the program director and college dean. Their joint response is attached.

The Graduate Council's comments are also included.

**University Curriculum Committee  
Academic Program Review[1]**

Physician Assistant (PA) Practice Program

**VIRTUAL SITE VISIT**

**January 27th and 28th, 2022**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Ohio University Physician Assistant (PA) Practice program is a **viable** program. The program has faced challenges throughout its history and has generally met success in spite of those. Continuing positive feedback from students indicates ongoing satisfaction from a student perspective, and the program is fully accredited. However, the current level of resources raises a question of maintaining viability over time, with retention of faculty and staff being the main point of concern. Greater support would likely not only improve that retention, but it would also address potential future accreditation issues.

**Commendations**

The Physician Assistant (PA) Practice Program is strong in the following areas:

- Students expressed high levels of satisfaction overall, including with the quality of instruction from faculty, the dedication and responsiveness of the staff to students' needs, the extent to which the program prepares students for jobs post-graduation, and the facilities on the OU Dublin campus.
- The program has a strong record of placing students into jobs post-graduation. No student has ever had to delay graduation due to a lack of placement, and students often find employment at the sites of their rotations.
- The faculty are extremely committed to the program and their students, as evidenced by their willingness to accommodate students' needs. For example, the faculty provide substantial mentorship to students on professional development issues in addition to course instruction. Additionally, the faculty recently decided to change the program matriculation date from late spring to early spring to better accommodate the typical timeline of students' job searches.
- The faculty demonstrate a strong awareness of the standards for accreditation and the relevance of these standards to their program. For instance, the faculty work to ensure that the required courses provide the scientific information as well as hands-on experience necessary for students to be successful post-graduation, and they continually assess students on their knowledge and skills in multiple ways throughout the duration of the program.
- The faculty and staff are clearly committed to diversity-related issues, as evidenced by their incorporation of such issues into coursework throughout the program. Furthermore,

the program faculty have expressed a desire and possible concrete steps to increase the diversity of the applicant pool.

- In general, the faculty and staff have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to the hardships the program has faced since its inception, as well as to improve the program despite these hardships.

### **Concerns**

The mission of the Physician Assistant (PA) Practice Program will be more effective if the following areas are acknowledged and/or addressed:

- There is a disconnect between the PA Practice program and other programs at Ohio University. This, in part, may be because the PA Practice Program is unique in that it is the only one at OHIO and it is located on the Dublin campus. The faculty and students can feel a bit cut off from the Athens campus. (Also, as one example of feeling “on an island”, PA Practice students are unallowed to use HCOM recreation facilities on the Dublin campus.) There is a need for better visibility within the College of Health Sciences and Professions, as well as the university more broadly.
- There is a lack of diversity in the applicant pool in some areas (e.g., racial/ethnic diversity).
- There is an immediate need for replacement of the administrative specialist and an administrator position (Clinical Training and Assessment Coordinator).
- The burden of administrative work that falls to faculty required by accreditation standards seems very high, in addition to their teaching load.
- There is a need to examine the roles and responsibilities of the Recruitment and Admissions Coordinator position. The person in this position is currently serving 4 different roles within the program.

### **Recommendations**

Following our review of the program, the committee puts forth the following recommendations:

- Take corrective action regarding staffing levels and descriptions: It would be beneficial to the program to both replace current staff vacancies and to re-evaluate the position descriptions of key staff members in order to ensure that position descriptions are reflective of the duties that are falling to each role.
- Explore faculty needs: We believe that a new faculty line should be considered, in light of accreditation standards and based on the faculty make-up of similar programs.
- Clarification of clinical faculty workload: Based on faculty interviews, we believe it would be worthwhile to consider and potentially revise faculty workload expectations, with particular attention to the role of scholarship. In addition to faculty interest in research, it is worth considering the potential advantages greater research exposure and opportunities offer to students. Among this consideration of expectations should be the potential value of incorporating tenure-eligible positions into the faculty structure, in how

it might affect perceptions of the program and faculty retention. Exploring the role of scholarship in the faculty workload of peer programs would be a helpful way to inform these decisions.

- Consideration of multi-year contracts: In order to better retain faculty within the program, we recommend the implementation of multi-year contracts for clinical faculty. The faculty handbook stipulates this should be available, depending on the years of a faculty member's service, and we encourage the College to make use of this option.

## INTRODUCTION

Bärbel Such, chair of the university's Program Review committee, constituted the program review and invited committee members to conduct an evaluation of the Physician Assistant program as part of the regular program review process in place at Ohio University. The committee undertaking the review was asked to consider a range of specific aspects of the program, as well as the program as a whole, to identify issues of concern, and to recognize and commend points of excellence.

The review was conducted remotely over the course of two days, January 27 and 28, 2022. The schedule was designed according to the program review guidelines established by the university. Throughout the two-day review, committee members met with stakeholders of the program including faculty, students, and staff, while also holding individual meetings with program director Melissa Bowlby and Interim Dean John McCarthy.

Prior to the review, the committee was provided with a comprehensive self-study report prepared under the direction of the program director, along with data pertinent to the program such as enrollment and recruitment numbers and accreditation guidelines. The following report includes our evaluation of the program's strengths and areas of concern, as well as recommendations to support and guide the program moving forward.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

According to the Ohio University [Physician Assistant Practice website](#), the Physician Assistant (PA) Practice program is “designed to prepare students to work in any clinical setting, with an emphasis on primary care in urban and rural medically under-served communities in Ohio and throughout Appalachia.”

This seven-semester, 27-month master's program is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA) and currently holds **Continued** status. The program will be up for program review again in 2029, contingent upon continued compliance with the Accreditation Standards and ARC-PA policy.

Planning for the PA Practice program began in 2012, received approval from the Ohio University Board of Trustees in 2014, and started their first cohort of 40 students in May of 2015. Since then, they have supported an average of 30-35 students per cohort, reportedly based on the limited number of preceptors at clinical sites to support students, and recently started their sixth cohort of students.

The PA Practice program is designed around seven course series to meet the goals of the program and to meet the accreditation standards. The seven course series are currently organized in this way:

1. Professional Development
2. Foundational Sciences
3. Clinical Nutrition
4. Clinical Skills
5. Clinical Medicine
6. Clinical Practice
7. Research

Students in the PA Practice program also complete a graduate project as partial fulfillment of a master's degree. In addition to their 15 months of didactic training, PA practice students then enter 12 months of supervised clinical experience with preceptors that include seven required clinical specialties and three selective rotations. These rotations take place in large medical centers, small urban/rural clinics and specialty clinics, in and out of the state of Ohio, and students are expected to learn about working with underserved communities.

## **FACULTY**

Leadership within the program consists of a full-time (1.0 FTE) program director, a full-time (1.0 FTE) director of clinical education, and a part-time (.4 FTE) medical director. Additionally, the faculty consists of four full-time clinical assistant faculty, each on an eleven-month contract, and instructional faculty who teach on a part-time basis. Part-time instructional faculty are assigned courses based on the need for additional sections and to fill in gaps related to medical specialty content delivery. Other considerations that inform these assignments and the number of instructional faculty needed are the workloads of full-time faculty, national student to faculty ratio benchmarks (as determined by the Physician Assistant Education Association), and other factors determined by the University and College. Unlike most CHSP programs, there are no tenure track faculty and no undergraduate teaching responsibilities

Accreditation standards stipulate that full-time program faculty must include a program director, medical director, at least three principal faculty (of which two must be NCCPA-certified PAs). In addition to meeting the academic needs of enrolled students, principal faculty are also expected to serve as student advisors and support administrative responsibilities. As advisors, faculty assist with data collection related to students' professional development and performance on programmatic assessments, compiling data, and analyzing trends over time.

Discussions with faculty indicate that they feel under-resourced. At this time, they feel that the curriculum and class materials are well-established, having recently been reviewed and updated. However, accreditation standards add ample responsibility to their roles. Requirements for data collection and analysis create a burden of expectations. The recent loss of a .5 FTE faculty position has added to the demands that current faculty experience, and they expressed hope that a posting for an additional principal faculty member would be approved. According to the program self-study, this position would also be integral to maintaining student to faculty ratios required by the accrediting body. There is also some ambiguity regarding expectations of scholarship or research with faculty roles; some faculty members have expressed a desire to pursue this part of their role, but that their other duties provide limited time to do so.

Despite these concerns raised by faculty, students consistently voice appreciation for program faculty. According to students, faculty are offering ample support regarding advising and career advice. Students also say that they value the instruction and information they receive from their faculty, both regarding the formal training required for licensure and in the sharing of practical experiences in the field. The teaching evaluations provided in the self-study (Appendix 27) show further support for the efficacy of the faculty in the classroom. Nearly all faculty are averaging course evaluation scores of above 4.0 out of 5, with half the faculty averaging scores above 4.5.

## **THE GRADUATE PROGRAM**

As noted above, the PA Practice program is 27 months, or seven semesters, long. Students matriculate at the beginning of the spring semester (January) and graduate at the end of the spring semester two years later (May). Until the 2020-2021 academic year, students matriculated in May and graduated in August two years later. However, because of the small window of time between graduation and the start of many students' full-time positions (typically September 1), the program faculty made the decision to shift from a May to January start date. This decision underscores the program faculty's commitment to meeting the needs of their students.

Students spend the first semester of the program learning the scientific foundations for physician assistant practice (e.g., through the 5-credit anatomy course, PA 5210). In subsequent semesters, students are introduced to principles of clinical medicine, consistent with the program's emphasis on balancing science and practice. Although the student:faculty ratio (18:1) is higher than the national average as well as comparable programs (e.g., University of Toledo, Marietta College), the use of student and alumni teaching assistants (TAs) helps offset this issue. For example, in PA 5210, second-year students in the program who have already taken the course volunteer to assist the first-year students with hands-on activities (e.g., dissections). Additionally, alumni from the community are hired to assist with lectures and course review sessions. The students expressed appreciation for having multiple sources of mentorship early on in the program, but they also noted that this can sometimes result in disorganization (e.g., different styles of teaching across the TAs). Furthermore, the students indicated that they viewed the campus facilities (e.g., classrooms, study rooms) and location in the Columbus metropolitan area as strengths of the program; however, they also mentioned feeling disconnected from the rest of the Ohio University community.

The diversity of the program is very similar to the national average, as reflected in data from the PA Education Association (PAEA). Averaging across all cohorts, the student body is 73.3% female (compared to the national average of 73.8% female) and 80.3% White/European American (compared to the national average of 77.5%); and the mean age at matriculation is 25.2 years (almost identical to the national average of 25 years). The program faculty acknowledged the need to increase the diversity of the applicant pools and noted recent efforts to connect with organizations such as the National Society of Black Physician Assistants. Additionally, diversity is a fundamental part of the program curriculum: The first-semester Physician Assistant Practice course (PA 5110) includes lectures, discussions, and self-assessments on cultural competence; the second-semester Health Promotion and Disease Prevention course (PA 5130) includes information about health disparities in populations; and the second- and third-semester Patient Assessment courses (PA 5310 and PA 5320) address the issues involved in working with diverse groups of people.

Students complete a total of ten rotations during their fifth, sixth, and seventh semesters in the program. Students are encouraged to treat these rotations as on-the-job interviews, and many receive job offers from the sites of their rotations. Although the program does not offer a formal post-graduation placement service, the faculty regularly invite speakers from outside Ohio University to discuss professional development issues, local residencies, and local fellowships with students. Students tend to be very successful in their post-graduation job searches; indeed, the program faculty noted that no student has ever delayed graduation due to lack of placement.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the Physician Assistant Program serves its students and Ohio University well, and it is the review committee's recommendation that the program be rated as **viable**.

## **COMMENDATIONS**

**See above**

## **CONCERNS**

**See above**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**See above**

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[1] Prepared in Spring 2022 by three internal reviewers recruited by the UCC Program Review Committee — Dr. Kimberly Rios (Department of Psychology), Dr. Cory Cronin (Department of Social and Public Health), and Dr. Courtney Koestler (Department of Teacher Education).



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March 17, 2022

Dear Dr. Such and Site Visit Team,

We, PA Melissa Bowlby, and Dean John McCarthy appreciate the opportunity to respond to the site visit report received on Monday, February 22, 2002. We would like to extend our gratitude to the site visit team, Drs. Cory Cronin, Courtney Koestler, and Kimberly Rios, for their time and effort with the comprehensive review of the Physician Assistant (PA) professional program conducted on January 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. After careful review of the site visit report, we have supplied responses below that relate to several sections of the report.

### **Executive Summary and Commendations**

We were thrilled to learn that the site visit team determined that the PA program is viable. The faculty and staff have worked extremely hard since the program's inception to overcome hardships and become a successful, reputable program. We take great pride in educating and supporting our students, so we appreciate this recognition. We also appreciate the recognition of the astute awareness that the program faculty and staff have related to understanding the ARC-PA accreditation standards. This awareness contributes to the success of the curriculum, administrative functioning of the program, and the overall success of our students and graduates.

### **Areas of Concerns and Recommendations**

**Location of the PA Program.** When the program was developing, the decision was made to place the program on the extension campus for a variety of reasons. Over the years, there have been challenges related to identity and communication and at many times there seemed to be a disconnect between the PA program needs and the understanding of our needs from the college. However, since the college has experienced a change in leadership and the program's reporting structure, this has improved the visibility of the program within the college. I suspect that if this continues, the program will continue to benefit from this greater awareness. Another challenge related to the program location includes student services and recreation. On the Dublin campus, the students do not have direct access to services such as academic advising, tutoring, career services, financial aid, registrar, bursar, testing center, library services, that other students in Athens have. Therefore, we have to allow time for our program's staff personnel to assist students with navigating these services and the faculty to provide academic advising and tutoring. Furthermore, students do not have student health services readily available. While the program has identified local resources to assist students with this service, this is just another example of a challenge on being on a non-traditional university campus. Finally, the PA students do not have access to recreational services such as work-out facilities.

**Program Personnel.** Thank you for recognizing the critical concern for replacing vacant staff positions, reclassifying the recruitment and admissions coordinator, and adding a faculty line. I will highlight below the progress that has been made on the staff positions along with the need for the faculty line.

Since the site visit, the Clinical Training and Assessment Coordinator (CTAC) and Administrative Specialist positions have been approved and are posted. The program hopes to

have these positions filled by the end of the spring semester. Also, a request for a job reclassification for the recruitment and admissions coordinator position has been submitted to human resources and the program is awaiting the results.

**Clinical Faculty Workload.** Calculating the clinical faculty workload has been a challenge since the inception of the program. As mentioned, the ARC-PA accreditation standards require the program to demonstrate compliance through comprehensive data collection, analysis, and outcomes reporting. This required administrative load places a high demand on the faculty workload in addition to their teaching and scholarship obligations. Because of this, the program has identified the need for an additional faculty line to not only help balance the existing faculty workload but to cover additional teaching responsibilities that will be needed once the revised curriculum is approved.

In the report, it was suggested that the program should consider a tenure-track faculty member with a research focus. We appreciate that suggestion and certainly the College of Health Sciences and Professions has a proportionately lower number of tenure track faculty relative to other colleges at the university. The generation of new knowledge is an important part of the college mission and that can take many forms. The program is still relatively new and with stabilizing enrollment, establishing clinical placements, and refining the curriculum there is still some stabilization to occur in the coming years. At this point, a tenure track faculty member would be aspirational as part of a longer-term plan. In the meantime, the flexible workload policy in the college does afford opportunities to build infrastructure relative to research within our program. Dr. Vasiloff is an example of a faculty member who built our evidence-based course sequence and who engages with students in conducting and presenting new research. Optimizing the research output and interests of our current faculty is still in development and consistent with a move toward a more robust research presence. We can also consult with our Athletic Training colleagues who deliberately built more research into their professional master's program very successfully. We will also need to respond to what the university chooses to do strategically in Dublin to look at collaborative opportunities. Currently, there is not a core group of researchers at the Dublin campus. Should the university seek to build more research infrastructure in Dublin because of opportunities to engage with industry or because of expanded research participant pools then we could definitely respond with more research-oriented faculty. Should the university choose a different direction that emphasizes undergraduate development or articulation with other community colleges in the Columbus area, then our strategy would adjust accordingly. Currently, in a clinically focused program, it could prove difficult to find an individual to balance the needed clinical teaching and administrative loads in addition to a research load. In researching other peer PA programs in Ohio, as suggested by the site visitors, we have found that the majority of programs have clinical track faculty. Two programs offer tenured track options to PA faculty. Also, when looking across CHSP, the trend has been to hire clinical and adjunct faculty for the clinically focused programs versus tenured track faculty. A clinical faculty line would be adequate to address the workload needs of the program, but the program would certainly consider the addition of a tenured track line.

**Diversity in the applicant pool.** The program is aware of this concern and has implemented strategic recruitment plans for minority students. This includes recruiting from minority student organizations along with historically black colleges. The program has recently partnered with three other programs to develop pipelines with the focus of educating middle school and high school students about the PA profession with the long-term goal of increasing the number of minority students who not only apply to the program but ultimately matriculate. The program is also revising its recruitment strategies and looking for more opportunities to visit with Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) along with looking for additional opportunities for outreach to high schools with high population rates of under-represented minorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John W. McCarthy".

John McCarthy, Interim Dean

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melissa Bowlby".

Melissa Bowlby, Program Director

**From:** [Charlotte Elster](#)  
**To:** [Such, Barbel](#)  
**Subject:** grad council recommendation to the PA practice program  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 5, 2022 11:04:50 AM

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**NOTICE:** This message was sent from outside Ohio University. Please use caution when clicking links or opening attachments in this message.

Hi Baerbel,

grad council worked electronically, and here is the recommendation to the PA practice program:

The Program Review Committee has brought forward this recommendation to Graduate Council as our input to UCC

Graduate council concurs with the findings of the review that the PA Practice Program is viable.

We also concur with the concerns and recommendations. From the response of the Interim Dean and Program Director we see that the concern of a lack of administrative support has already been addressed by two positions being approved. We also concur with the findings in the review that the program has an astute awareness related to the ARC-PA accreditation standards.

hope this is in time for your meeting.

Charlotte

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