

**SHENANDOAH UNIVERSITY**

**PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM**

# **Admission Guidelines Booklet**

**ACADEMIC YEAR 2010 – 2011**

# **Shenandoah University**

## **MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES**

### **Introduction**

This Admission Guidelines Booklet is designed to provide both the potential and matriculated student with information about the educational program leading to a Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies. It should be viewed as an adjunct to Shenandoah University's **Graduate Catalog** and the Shenandoah University **Physician Assistant Program Student Handbook**, which contain specific information regarding the university and related policies. The information herein is subject to periodic revision, and these changes will be relayed to students in a timely manner. It is ultimately the student's responsibility to be aware of all degree requirements and to work closely with an advisor to ensure these requirements are fulfilled.

### **Overview of the Profession and Program**

Physician Assistants (PAs) are health-care professionals prepared to practice medicine with physician supervision. Within the physician/PA relationship, physician assistants exercise autonomy in decision-making and provide a wide range of diagnostic and therapeutic services. The role of the physician assistant includes provision of primary and specialty care in medical and surgical practices located in rural, urban or suburban areas. Physician assistant practice is patient-care centered but may include education, research and administrative duties.

The Shenandoah University Physician Assistant program is a graduate entry-level professional course of study enabling individuals who hold baccalaureate degrees to become physician assistants. The program is designed to prepare graduates for primary-care practice with emphasis on service to medically underserved populations and the team approach to the delivery of health care. The program integrates graduate-level critical thinking and analysis, problem solving, scientific inquiry, self-directed learning and the effective use of modern technology for professional practice that includes elements of research, leadership, education and continued enhancement of the physician assistant profession.

### **Purpose and Goals**

The purpose of the Physician Assistant program is to graduate competent professionals who are well prepared for the demands of modern professional practice in a rapidly changing health-care environment. The curriculum goals are based upon the AAPA/PAEA/NCCPA/ARC-PA "Competencies for the Physician Assistant" document, standards for educational programs contained in the "Accreditation Standards for Physician Assistant Education," the Program's Mission Statement, and the needs of the PA profession. In the PA program curriculum, knowledge, skills and attitudes are considered to be critical elements of professional practice and are addressed in the following curricular goals.

The graduate of the Physician Assistant program will demonstrate the following:

1. Entry-level proficiencies necessary for high quality, cost-effective practice as a primary care physician assistant in a dynamic health-care delivery system.
2. An understanding of the principles of scientific inquiry and research design as well as the ability to apply these principles to critically read and interpret the literature, leading to enhanced delivery of health care.
3. An ability to incorporate the basic principles of education and teaching-learning into programs that benefit the patient, the patient's family and the community.
4. Attitudes and skills that exemplify a commitment to personal growth and development and to the growth and development of the profession.
5. Attitudes and skills that demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and individual differences.
6. An ability to assume a leadership role in professional activities and organizations that advance the physician assistant profession.
7. A team and community-oriented approach to the delivery of health care utilizing appropriate modern technologies for the benefit of the patient, the patient's family and the community.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Shenandoah University Division of Physician Assistant Studies is to provide a comprehensive educational program in a collaborative and supportive environment to develop highly skilled, well-educated, compassionate primary-care oriented physician assistants who are capable of providing high quality, patient-centered health care in a variety of settings.

### **CORE VALUES**

#### **We believe physician assistants should:**

1. Practice competently, ethically, and cost-effectively
2. Serve where needed, both domestically and globally
3. Demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and individual differences
4. Commit to continued personal and professional growth through lifelong learning
5. Contribute to the profession and humankind through leadership, teaching and active scholarship
6. Promote wellness and personal responsibility for maintaining health
7. Advocate for a team approach to health care delivery
8. Promote and uphold the physician assistant profession and its ideals
9. Enrich patients and communities through service and a broad-based humanistic approach to the practice of their profession

### **Curriculum Design**

The curriculum design is based upon the concepts of adult-centered learning and professional education, which focus on mastery of knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the graduate to practice effectively

as a physician assistant. The curriculum, offered in didactic and experiential components, is an approach which moves from basic to more advanced skills. The curriculum design assumes students will develop the necessary skills to be self-directed learners and will effectively apply what they learn in the clinical setting.

### **Program Delivery Model**

The Physician Assistant program is offered on a full-time basis only. Length of the program is seven semesters (27 months). The credit load ranges from nine to 15 hours per semester. Students are expected to adjust their non-curricular demands in order to complete the degree requirements. *As adult learners, it is expected that students will actively engage in independent study, inquiry and clinical rotations outside the classroom to augment learning and to maximize effectiveness of classroom and laboratory contact time.* Students will be expected to complete and present a scholarly project as a culmination of their studies.

Since the PA program will use computer technology in the delivery of the curriculum, all PA students must be computer literate. The Shenandoah University PA program has implemented a technology program, which provides a laptop computer and technology support. Participation in this program is mandatory.

**Note:** It is not recommended that any student attempt to continue employment while attending the Physician Assistant program.

### **Application Process & Time Line**

The Physician Assistant program will admit students once a year for the fall semester only. An individual's application will be further processed by the Shenandoah University PA program after the completed CASPA application is received.

What is a completed file? To be considered complete by the Shenandoah University PA program, an applicant's file must meet the following requirements:

1. CASPA application must be complete with all transcripts verified.
2. All three references received by CASPA.
3. Official GRE score report received by Shenandoah University.
4. Plan included for outstanding prerequisites. This plan should be listed on the planned or in-progress section of the CASPA application and must include name of institution, course name and number, and semester expected to enroll. A list of prerequisite courses may be found at: <http://www.su.edu/pa/requirements.asp> and later in this document. Typically, files are less competitive if there are more than two outstanding pre-requisites at the beginning of spring term the year the student intends to begin the PA Program.

In addition, international students must submit:

1. Independent evaluation by an academic credential evaluation company for transcripts from countries outside the United States.
2. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores.

Note: It is the applicant’s responsibility to follow up with CASPA and Shenandoah University to make sure all requirements are met and documents received. Email is preferred.

The application review will include evaluation of the following in order to estimate the candidate’s aptitude and preparation for graduate studies; commitment to service, patient care, and the PA profession; interpersonal skills; and fit with the SU PA program’s mission and values:

1. Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) as calculated by CASPA
2. BCP (biology, chemistry, physics) GPA as calculated by CASPA
3. Graduate Record Examination (GRE) Scores
4. Number of outstanding prerequisites and plan for completion
5. References
6. Narrative
7. Quality and length of prior health care experience
8. Commitment to people-oriented service and underserved areas
9. Extracurricular activities

After application review, the most promising candidates are invited for an all-day personal interview. Personal interviews are offered to the most qualified applicants to assess interpersonal and communication skills, maturity, as well as the candidate’s understanding and commitment to the PA career and the SU PA program’s mission and values.

There are a limited number of seats available for the program. In order to increase chances of acceptance, early application is encouraged. Due to the rolling admission process, there are typically less seats available to candidates who interview later in the admissions cycle. It is very beneficial to apply to CASPA well before the deadline. Priority will be given to candidates with the strongest complete applications submitted with all supporting documentation prior to October 1. The following schedule will assist you with planning.

CASPA opens	April 15
Application Due to CASPA	January 15
Supporting materials (GRE scores, references, etc.) due to program or CASPA	January 15
Application and supporting materials due for priority consideration	October 1
Interview of top candidates	October – March
Invitation to those selected	October – April
Commitment response due	Two weeks after invitation
Mandatory pre-orientation	End of June
Mandatory orientation	Wednesday-Friday prior to start of classes
Classes start	End of August

## **Admission Requirements**

To be considered for the Physician Assistant program, applicants must:

1. Submit all application materials to the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) at [www.caspaonline.org](http://www.caspaonline.org), including official transcripts for all institutions of higher education attended and three recommendations.
2. Submit official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test (verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing) scores from exams taken after 2002. These must be sent directly to Shenandoah University, college code 5613. While there is no minimum GRE score required for admission, the successful candidate generally has scores above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Note: GRE test scores are not required if the applicant already possesses a relevant graduate degree.

### **Graduate Record Examination (GRE)**

<http://www.gre.org>

1-609-771-7670

International students must have their transcripts submitted for independent evaluation of equivalency by an acceptable credential evaluation agency. International students are also required to demonstrate English language proficiency by submitting scores from TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), as outlined in the Graduate Catalog.

All applicants are asked to read and adhere to the CASPA Admissions Code of Cooperation available on the CASPA web site at: [https://portal.caspaonline.org/faq/admissions\\_code.htm](https://portal.caspaonline.org/faq/admissions_code.htm).

3. Preference will be given to candidates who can demonstrate a commitment to practice in primary care in rural or urban medically underserved areas. Candidates requesting this preference must do so in writing directly to the PA program (not CASPA) and include their rationale for the request along with supporting documentation. This can be documented through prior work or community volunteer experience.
4. Candidates with formal health-care experience must submit copies of any license, registration or certification related to that field. These should be mailed directly to the SU PA program.
5. As a part of the CASPA application, candidates will prepare an admissions narrative, which will be evaluated by the admissions committee and must be considered graduate student quality. Use this narrative to explain why you are interested in becoming a physician assistant. In addition, candidates are encouraged to use the CASPA narrative to explain any aspects of their application that may require clarification (e.g., gaps in education or work, etc.).

6. Health-care experience (voluntary or paid) is not required, but highly suggested and considered by the SU PA admissions committee. This will also be documented within the CASPA application.

7. Academic Requirements:

Applicants must hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with a minimum 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale) undergraduate cumulative grade point average (GPA) to be considered for regular admission. A candidate with less than a 3.0 undergraduate grade point average may be considered for admission with regular student status if he/she has completed at least 15 semester hours of applicable coursework at the graduate level and has a minimum GPA of 3.0 for these courses.

Applicants must complete the following prerequisite coursework (documented via official transcripts):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| a. Human (or related) Anatomy and Physiology | 2 semesters                                       |
| b. Chemistry                                 | 2 semesters, one must be Biochemistry             |
| c. Microbiology                              | 1 semester  |
| d. Psychology                                | 2 semesters, one must be Developmental Psychology |
| e. Mathematics (preferably statistics)       | 1 semester  |
| f. Medical Terminology                       | 1 semester  |

Notes: Science courses, identified above, (except Biochemistry) must include a lecture and a laboratory. In order to satisfy a prerequisite, courses must have been passed with a grade of C or better at an accredited college or university. A grade of C minus (C-) will not be accepted. In order to be competitive, however, it is strongly recommended that prerequisites be completed with a grade of B or better. Science courses must be current within ten (10) years of application. Distance education formats are discouraged for the science courses that require a laboratory component. In some cases, work experience specific to the science course older than 10 years may substitute for repeating the course. Contact the PA program for information on how to request the substitution.

Anatomy and physiology sequence should be taken at the same university to ensure continuity and must cover all body systems. Functional anatomy, anatomy and physiology designed for specific disciplines, or fundamentals of anatomy and physiology courses are generally not counted toward the A&P requirement.

The PA program uses a rolling admissions process. Early application is strongly encouraged. After the interview is conducted, the admissions committee may recommend one of the following based upon the collective judgment of the committee and a point scoring system:

- a. Acceptance: Candidates with all prerequisites completed will be recommended for full acceptance. Candidates with outstanding prerequisites will be recommended for

conditional acceptance. The number of candidates recommended for acceptance will be determined annually by the PA program class size.

- b. Admission Alternates: A limited number of applicants will be ranked as alternates and will generally be notified of their admission status on or before August 1. Applicants not admitted from the alternate list must reapply, if they wish to be considered in subsequent years.
- c. Non-Acceptance: Applicants denied acceptance will be notified in writing. Candidates wishing to be considered in a subsequent admission cycle must reapply and must satisfy all admission requirements for that cycle.

### **Conditional Acceptance Status**

An applicant must complete the general admission requirements specified above. Circumstances that may result in a conditional admission include:

1. An applicant with a bachelor's degree in progress. An official transcript with the degree posted must be received prior to June 30.
2. An applicant with an undergraduate cumulative grade point average (GPA) less than 3.0 but greater than 2.80 and who has not completed a minimum of 15 semester hours of relevant graduate work with a 3.0 or better GPA, as specified earlier, may be admitted with conditional status. The student must achieve a 3.0 in the first semester of the physician assistant curriculum or may be subject to dismissal. Given the competitive nature of the applicant pool, the admissions committee rarely offers acceptance to candidates with GPAs less than 3.0
3. An applicant who has any prerequisite courses to complete at the time of application may be admitted with conditional status, with a clear understanding that remaining prerequisites must be satisfactorily completed prior to June 30. Typically, students with more than two outstanding prerequisites are less competitive. Official transcripts or other appropriate documentation will be required.

### **Transfer and Credit for Experiential Learning**

The Division of PA Studies will consider requests for up to 12 semester hours (or equivalent quarter hours) of transfer credit into the curriculum. In order to be considered, courses must have been successfully completed with a grade of "B" or better in a graduate-level program at an accredited institution of higher learning. Courses will be considered for transfer only if they are directly applicable to the established physician assistant program curriculum, as determined by the faculty after thorough review of all appropriate documents (application, transcripts, recommendations and personal request letter).

If the request for transfer is from another physician assistant educational program, it must be from another graduate-level program in which the student is in good standing, and with the specific recommendation of the program director, dean or other appropriate official. The faculty will determine

satisfaction of program course prerequisites for transfer students from other PA programs on a case-by-case basis. Transfer candidates must fulfill the Shenandoah University prerequisites prior to matriculation. Candidates not accepted as a transfer student may apply to the program during a regular admission cycle.

The program does not offer academic credit for experiential learning. However, matriculated students with appropriate documented experience may request the instructor of record to accept the experience in lieu of a specific course requirement. The request must be in writing and supporting documentation included. The faculty member has the option of accepting the experience, accepting the experience but requiring a competency evaluation, or denying the request. If the course requirement is waived without examination, the weighting of other course requirements will be adjusted accordingly.

### **Technical Standards for Admission**

The technical standards for admission establish the expectations and abilities considered essential for students admitted to the Physician Assistant program in order to achieve the level of competency required for graduation and practice. All students admitted to the PA program are expected to be able to demonstrate the abilities specified below.

Physician Assistant program students:

- must have the mental capacity to assimilate and learn a large amount of complex, technical and detailed information; to solve clinical problems; and to synthesize and apply concepts and information from various disciplines in order to formulate diagnostic and therapeutic plans;
- must have the ability to maintain composure and emotional stability during periods of high stress;
- must have the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients from different social and cultural backgrounds and develop effective professional rapport with patients and co-workers;
- must have the ability to record examination and diagnostic results clearly, accurately and efficiently;
- must have adequate sensory function to fulfill minimum competency objectives for inspection, palpation, percussion and auscultation necessary to perform a physical examination;
- must possess sufficient postural control, neuromuscular control and eye-to-hand coordination to use standard medical/surgical instruments and possess sufficient control of the upper extremities to meet the physical requirements for training and for performing a safe physical examination or procedure;

- are expected to learn and perform common diagnostic and therapeutic procedures (e.g., blood drawing, suturing) and interpret the results;
- are expected to have the degree of coordination of motor skills necessary to respond to emergency situations quickly and appropriately.

Applicants are urged to ask questions about the program's technical standards for clarification and to determine whether they can meet the requirements with or without reasonable accommodations. Questions may be directed to the Program Director or Director of Academic Support Services. Revealing a disability is voluntary; however, such disclosure is necessary before any accommodations may be made in the learning environment or in the program's procedures. Information about disabilities is handled in a confidential manner. Reasonable accommodations will be made to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. These require program and institutional approval. Requests for accommodations must be submitted in writing with appropriate documentation, allowing sufficient time prior to matriculation for action on these requests. Candidates who feel that they may not meet the technical standards are encouraged to contact the program director to discuss and identify what accommodations, if any, can be made by Shenandoah University so that the candidate might be able to meet the standards.

### **Deferment Policy**

The Shenandoah PA program has a policy not to honor requests for deferment of admission during the period between formal acceptance and matriculation.

### **Other Requirements**

Applicants selected for admission to the program must provide evidence of good health and up-to-date immunizations prior to matriculation. Prior to beginning health professional courses, students are required to authorize and submit to a criminal background check, including sex offenses and crimes against minors. Students may also be expected to submit to drug testing required by clinical practice sites. Non-compliance with the criminal background checks and/or drug testing policies may be cause for dismissal from a program of study.

In addition, students are required to maintain health insurance and liability insurance coverage. Further information will be reviewed in detail at orientation. Accepted students are required to attend all orientation sessions scheduled by the program.

## Curriculum

Note: Physician Assistant Program courses listed below may not be taken out of sequence and require a passing grade of C or better for progression. Policies regarding academic standing and graduation are contained in the Graduate Catalog and the Physician Assistant Program Student Handbook.

### Course Sequence

<b>YEAR ONE</b>			
<b>Semester</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>Course #</b>
<b>FALL I</b>			
	Medical Physiology & Genetics	3	PA-504
	Physician Assistant & Health Care Dynamics	2	PA-510
	Principles of Epidemiology, Research & Statistics	3	PA-512
	Principles of Interviewing and Patient Interactions	2	PA-514
	Anatomy for Physician Assistants I	<u>3</u>	PA-503
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	
<b>SPRING I</b>			
	Anatomy for Physician Assistants II	3	PA-505
	History Taking & Patient Evaluation	4	PA-516
	Functional Neuroanatomy	3	PA-672
	Clinical Medicine I	<u>5</u>	PA-522
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	
<b>SUMMER I</b>			
	Clinical Pharmacology	4	PA-540
	Diagnostic & Therapeutic Skills	5	PA-518
	Emergency Medicine & Surgery	<u>3</u>	PA-524
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	
<b>YEAR TWO</b>			
<b>Semester</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>Course #</b>
<b>FALL II</b>			
	Clinical Therapeutics	2	PA-640
	Clinical Medicine II	3	PA-642
	Obstetrics & Gynecology & Pediatrics	3	PA-580
	Behavioral Medicine	2	PA-582
	Humanities for the PA Profession	<u>3</u>	PA-610
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	
<b>SPRING II</b>			
	Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Strategies	2	PA-612
	Clinical Practicum I-III	9	(see below)*
	Scholarly Project I	<u>1</u>	PA-660
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	
<b>SUMMER II</b>			
	Clinical Practicum IV-VI	<u>9</u>	(see below)*
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>FALL III</b>			
	Community Preceptorship	6	PA-650
	Scholarly Project II and Capstone	<u>3</u>	PA-662
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	
	<b>TOTAL PROGRAM HOURS</b>	<b>83</b>	

\*Note: Clinical rotations will average six weeks each and have their own course number.

## **PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT**

### **Accreditation Status & NCCPA Pass Rate**

The Physician Assistant program is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA). Graduates of accredited programs are eligible to take the national certifying examination offered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). Most states require certification in order to practice.

As of April 1, 2009, the aggregate first-time taker pass rate of Shenandoah University Physician Assistant program graduates (Classes 2003 – 2008) is 98.5 percent. The national pass rate for the same time period is 91.5 percent. Additional information regarding SU PA program's graduate performance on the national certification examination is found on the program's Web site.

### **Cost & Financial Aid**

Tuition and fees are set annually. It is estimated that tuition and fees for the 2009-10 academic year will be \$695 per semester credit hour or an estimated total of \$57,685 for the entire program. Additional costs are estimated to be \$10,035 which includes the required technology program cost (\$2500), ACLS, books, medical equipment, liability insurance and supplies. Students are responsible for their own living expenses, travel to and from clinical rotations, and costs associated with temporary housing while on assigned clinical rotations. Applicants accepted for admission must submit a \$500 Advanced Tuition Deposit according to their letter of acceptance. The Advanced Tuition Deposit is non-refundable.

Financial aid for graduate students is available primarily through student loans and private sources. Virginia residents may be eligible for the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (VTAG). If you have questions or need further information about financial aid, please contact:

Financial Aid Office  
(540) 665-4538  
(800) 432-2266  
[www.su.edu/financialaid/ga.asp](http://www.su.edu/financialaid/ga.asp)

Through the generosity of alumni, community friends and foundations, the Shenandoah University PA program is able to provide several scholarships each year. It is anticipated that more than \$30,000 will be available for scholarship awards this academic year. Additional information regarding SU as well as private and professional association scholarships will be provided at orientation. Candidates interested in exploring loan repayment opportunities through the National Health Service Corps scholarships should call NHSC at (800) 221-9393 or visit the NHSC Web site <http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/applications/scholarship>.

## **Non-Discrimination Policy**

Shenandoah University does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age or physical disability.

### Office of Admissions

540-665-4581

800-432-2266

540-665-4627 (fax)

[admit@su.edu](mailto:admit@su.edu)

[www.su.edu](http://www.su.edu)

### Physician Assistant Program

540-542-6208

540-545-7381

540-542-6210 (fax)

[pa@su.edu](mailto:pa@su.edu)

[www.su.edu/pa](http://www.su.edu/pa)