



Success of the Physician Assistant Program in Achieving its Goals

The South College Master of Health Science Physician Assistant Program is in Knoxville, TN, with an extension campus in Atlanta, GA. The third cohort of students that matriculated at the Atlanta campus is the class of 2023.

Goals

The South College Physician Assistant (PA) program has 6 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.

Average Student Preparedness for the South College Physician Assistant Program, Classes of 2022-2024.					
Student Preparedness	Class of 2022 [^]	Class of 2023	Class of 2024 Knoxville	Class of 2024 Atlanta	National average*
Undergraduate GPA	3.54	3.59	3.62	3.59	3.64
GRE scores (V/Q/A)	155/153/4.1	153/152/4.2	153/152/4.2	152/151/4.1	153/152/4.1
Patient Care Experience (hours)	1,954	1,533	2,259	2,048	3,240
PA Program Graduation Rate	95.2%	91.8%	TBD	TBD	93.3%

[^]Class of 2022-Knoxville campus = 85; Atlanta campus 60; *Averages for PA students nationally (Physician Assistant Education Association, [By the Numbers: Program Report 36: Data from the 2021 Program Survey](#), Washington, DC: PAEA; 2024).

TBD – to be determined. Students in the class of 2024 will graduate in December 2024.

The South College benchmark is to be comparable with national averages.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program selects highly qualified applicants for admission into the program where on average matriculating students are near, at, or above the national average for undergraduate GPAs, GRE scores, and South College PA program graduation rates.

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 (5 quarters, approx. 11 weeks each) and continues with a 12-month supervised clinical learning phase (8 rotations, approx. 5.5 weeks each).

The didactic curriculum is sequenced to provide a baseline of normal gross anatomy and physiology, the introduction of PA professional issues, and health assessment and physical examination in the first quarter. Clinical assessment, pharmacotherapeutic, medical specialty, research, and behavioral and social science courses are sequenced throughout the 5 didactic quarters, with neuroanatomy and neurologic disorders delivered in the fourth quarter.

The didactic phase includes a variety of learning strategies combining formal lectures, case-based learning, practical hands-on clinical laboratory skills, 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 basic medical sciences, clinical preparatory sciences, professional issues, public health, and lifestyle medicine 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 lifelong learning skills and the appropriate use of medical literature in Evidence-based Medicine, Research Design and Methodology, and Capstone Research Project courses. The Capstone Research Project, performed in groups, requires each student to apply specific knowledge and skills acquired in the structured competency-based PA curriculum for original research or an evidence-based clinical project. Our students have presented their research at conferences through academic posters and have published in prominent peer-reviewed journals.

At the culmination of the didactic phase, the Didactic Summative Evaluation (DSE) course focuses on the 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, Level of Competence with Skills Taught in the Program, Class of 2021-2023*.			
Area Assessed	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Class of 2023
Obtain a detailed and accurate medical history	4.76	4.71	4.81
Perform a comprehensive physical examination	4.61	4.59	4.61
Develop a preliminary diagnosis and a secondary problem list	4.44	4.47	4.47
Identify, order, and interpret diagnostic tests	4.17	4.34	4.25
Accurately record, organize, and utilize the medical record	4.28	4.32	4.49
Access and analyze the patient's history	4.63	4.55	4.62
Formulate and implement treatment plans	4.19	4.25	4.27
Recognize and manage life-threatening emergencies	4.15	4.20	4.01
Identify and perform procedures common to primary care	4.27	4.37	4.56
Make appropriate referrals to specialists	4.41	4.47	4.57
Consult with a physician in situations beyond the PA's scope of expertise	4.35	4.45	4.61
Demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills as a healthcare professional	4.41	4.59	4.65
Interact with patients respecting cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences	4.49	4.43	4.57
Counsel and educate patients regarding health promotion, disease prevention, and health risk interventions	4.48	4.54	4.48
Counsel, evaluate, and refer for psychosocial problems	4.33	4.38	4.29
Understand and integrate the principles of information technology and evidence-based medicine into clinical practice	4.28	4.35	4.49
Promote lifelong learning with appropriate use of medical literature	4.48	4.57	4.55
Understand the role of the Physician Assistant in the healthcare team	4.61	4.79	4.75

*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 equal to or greater than 4.0 in all areas.*

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

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 8 supervised clinical practice experiences, each is approx. 5.5 weeks in length, in which each student applies knowledge obtained from the didactic phase, continues learning in the clinical 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 (EOR) for targeted learning experiences and to demonstrate the acquisition of knowledge and skills through end-of-rotation exams, case presentations, and hands-on practical exams.

Preceptor Feedback, Student Preparedness for Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences, Classes of 2021-2023*.			
Area Assessed	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Class of 2023
Medical Interview	4.85	4.85	4.86
Physical Examination	4.83	4.83	4.83
Oral Case Presentation	4.83	4.84	4.85
Written Patient Record	4.86	4.85	4.87
Knowledge of Diagnostic Studies	4.80	4.78	4.81
Ability to Perform Clinical Procedures	4.86	4.88	4.87
Problem-solving/Critical Thinking	4.83	4.83	4.84
Factual Knowledge & Concepts	4.82	4.83	4.83
Assessment/Differential Diagnosis	4.81	4.81	4.82
Ability to Form Management Plan	4.80	4.81	4.82
Ability to Implement Management Plan	4.83	4.82	4.84
Relating to Colleagues	4.93	4.92	4.93
Relating to Patients	4.93	4.93	4.93
Understanding Role of PA	4.95	4.91	4.94
Self-confidence	4.86	4.85	4.87
Reliability and Dependability	4.94	4.92	4.94
Professionalism	4.91	4.89	4.91
Internal Medicine Rotation	4.87	4.85	4.81
General Surgery Rotation	4.77	4.72	4.77
Family Medicine Rotation	4.90	4.91	4.93
Emergency Medicine Rotation	4.83	4.88	4.89
Women's Health Rotation	4.93	4.94	4.91
Pediatric Rotation	4.81	4.81	4.85
Behavioral Health Rotation	4.93	4.91	4.92
Elective Rotation	4.84	4.87	4.88

*Clinical preceptors evaluate their students at the end of their 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.

The Clinical Summative Review (CSR) course (taken within the last 3 months of the program) is comprehensive and designed to ensure that each student has met defined program objectives for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes suitable for clinical practice upon graduation. 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 CSR course also includes specific clinical skill stations to evaluate each student’s psychomotor skills and a board review examination.

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 2019-2023.					
Areas Assessed	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
South College first-time takers pass rate	94%	94%	90% K; 95% A	96% K; 97% A	92% K; 94% A
National first-time takers pass rate	95%	93%	92%	92%	92%^
South College all takers pass rate	100%	100%	99%	96% ^a	TBD*
National all-takers pass rate	97%	96%	95%	95%	95%^
Number of SC students tested	83	83	121	138	156
Number of National students tested	9990	11390	11627	12330	TBD
Employment rate of South College graduates*	100%	100%	100%	99%	TBD

^ The official national average cannot be provided until the entire 2024 calendar year has been completed. Although the students graduate in December of their graduation year, their national average pass rate is the next year since they start taking PANCE in January. For example, the Class of 2021 is compared to the national pass rate published for the calendar year 2022.

TBD* Graduates who were unsuccessful on the first attempt are registered to retake the exam. Employment data are still being gathered for the class of 2023.

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 within one year post-graduation.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program provides each student with a comprehensive clinical curriculum where preceptors rate students on average as excellent showing they are competent, compassionate, and comprehensive healthcare providers. Furthermore, the clinical curriculum during EOR days continues to prepare students to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam.

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

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 healthcare 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.

Community service allows our Physician Assistant students to improve patient care practices and promote the PA profession. Community service focuses on personal service, direct patient contact, and civic responsibility. We embrace community service for medically underserved and economically disadvantaged populations. Community service programs involve PA students and PA faculty in activities that address local needs while promoting their lifelong learning skills and professional development.

Student Community Service Hours, Classes of 2020-2023.				
Community Service Hours	Class of 2020	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Class of 2023
Average	55.8	53.46	56.0	58.8
Minimum	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0
Maximum	161.0	72.37	140.75	250.5
Total Hours Served	4,693	6,488	7,761	9,176

The South College requirement is for all students to acquire a minimum of 50 hours of community service.

Membership in the Tennessee Academy of Physician Assistants, Georgia 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 2020-2022.				
Professional Organization	Class of 2020	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Class of 2023
Tennessee Academy of Physician Assistants (TAPA)	100%	100% (K)	100% (K)	100% (K)
Georgia Academy of Physician Assistants (GAPA)	n/a	100% (A)	100% (A)	100% (A)
American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)	100%	100%	100%	100%

n/a – Atlanta’s first cohort was the Class of 2021.

The South College benchmark is for 100% of students to be members of TAPA (Knoxville Campus), GAPA (Atlanta Campus) and AAPA.

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program provides students 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 national average student-to-faculty ratio (SFR) for all PA programs with an extension campus is 14.1 (Physician Assistant Education Association, [By the Numbers: Program Report 36: Data from the 2021 Program Survey](#), Washington, DC: PAEA; 2024). The South College PA program seeks to be comparable to the national SFR. The Knoxville campus has an SFR of 14.6 and the Atlanta campus has an SFR of 14.1. The South College PA program SFR (14.6 K; 14.1 A) is comparable to the national SFR (14.1), 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, neurology, endocrinology, behavioral medicine, general surgery, orthopedics, anatomy, public health, genetics, and research. In addition to the full-time principal 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 members per quarter, both as lecturers in the classroom and as proctors for small groups, hands-on, and clinical laboratory experiences.

The PA program has sufficient administrative and technical support staff members to assist the faculty in accomplishing their assigned tasks. These 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 or NPs who are teamed with physicians who are specialty board-certified in their area of instruction. The PA program has active clinical sites across many states, with >1,600 rotations that cover internal medicine, general surgery, family medicine/geriatrics, emergency medicine, women's health, pediatrics, clinical psychiatry and behavioral health, and elective disciplines (most common are ortho and derm).

In addition to our 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, career services 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 compliant with the ARC-PA *Standards*. In 2019, ARC-PA approved our application for a distant campus in Atlanta, Georgia. This adds the "Distant Campus Expansion Requirements" to our accreditation for the next review.

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.

The program's accreditation history can be viewed on the ARC-PA website at: <https://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/accredited-programs/>

While accreditation is considered a voluntary process, graduation from an ARC-PA accredited program is a requirement to be eligible to take 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.