

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 a distant campus in Atlanta, GA. The 6th cohort of students that matriculated at the Atlanta campus is the class of 2026.

Goals

The South College Physician Assistant (PA) program has 6 primary goals that support our mission and vision to educate the next generation of highly qualified physician assistants.

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

KNOXVILLE Campus: Average Student Preparedness for the South College Physician Assistant Program, Classes of 2024-2026.				
Student Preparedness	Class of 2024	Class of 2025	Class of 2026	National average*
Undergraduate GPA	3.55	3.71	3.68	3.64
Undergraduate SCI GPA	3.62	3.64	3.61	3.52
GRE scores (V/Q/A)	153/152/4.2	153/153/4.1	153/152/4.1	153/152/4.1
PA Program Graduation %	92.9%	97.6%^	TBD	93.3%

ATLANTA Campus: Average Student Preparedness for the South College Physician Assistant Program, Classes of 2024-2026.				
Student Preparedness	Class of 2024	Class of 2025	Class of 2026	National average*
Undergraduate GPA	3.59	3.64	3.61	3.64
Undergraduate SCI GPA	3.51	3.56	3.50	3.52
GRE scores (V/Q/A)	152/151/4.2	151/151/4.1	152/152/4.2	153/152/4.1
PA Program Graduation %	92.9%	94.1%	TBD	93.3%

*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).

^1 student is anticipated to graduate after this report is posted and not calculated into the graduation %.

TBD – to be determined. Students in the class of 2026 will graduate in December 2026.

The South College minimum benchmark for the entering cohort average of UG GPA and UG SCI GPA is 3.0, and GRE V & Q is 150, and GRE A is 3.5. The strength benchmark is at or above national averages.

Click for the [Knoxville student demographics](#)

Click for the [Atlanta student demographics](#)

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

2. **Provide students with a rigorous didactic curriculum that prepares them for clinical rotations.**

The South College PA program is 27 months long and begins with a 15-month didactic phase (5 quarters, approx. 11 weeks each), followed by a 12-month supervised clinical learning phase (8 rotations, approx. 6 weeks each).

The didactic phase includes a variety of learning strategies that combine formal lectures, case-based learning, practical, hands-on clinical laboratory skills, clinical simulation, 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 and problem-solving clinical skills. The didactic curriculum focuses on basic medical sciences, clinical preparatory sciences, professional issues, public health, and lifestyle medicine, with a sequence of information across courses that enables 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, conducted in groups, requires each student to apply specific knowledge and skills acquired in the structured, competency-based PA curriculum to an original research project or an evidence-based clinical review project. Our students have presented their research at conferences through academic posters and published it in prominent peer-reviewed journals ([see Knoxville Student Publications](#)).

At the culmination of the didactic phase (Quarter 5), the students take PACKRAT week 1 or 2 to assess their core medical knowledge, based on our internal benchmark. Furthermore, the Didactic Summative Evaluation (DSE) course focuses on assessing student history-taking and physical examination skills; communication and clinical reasoning; the ability to summarize and document clinical encounter findings; critical thinking for differential diagnosis and treatment, and the demonstration of clinical and technical skills. Each student must score at least 80% in the DSE course to progress to the clinical learning year.

[View the detailed Didactic Curriculum](#)

Didactic Phase Outcomes			
(K) Knoxville; (A) Atlanta			
Item or Outcome	Class of 2024	Class of 2025	Class of 2026
Number entering didactic phase/matriculated	85	85	85
N Av = National Average	N Av 134	N Av 132	N Av 132
Didactic PACKRAT – taken week 1 or 2 of Quarter 5	K 143 A 147	K 144 A 134	K 139 A 136
Number who started Qtr. 5 and passed Didactic Summative Evaluation (DSE) with $\geq 80\%$.	K 100% A 100%	K 100% A 100%	K 100% A 96%
Average Cumulative Didactic GPA	K 3.61 A 3.71	K 3.70 A 3.64	K 3.68 A 3.67
Number entering the clinical phase	K 79 A 79	K 84 A 80	K 79 A 81
Preceptor Evaluation: How well was the student prepared for the rotation? (1=Unsatisfactory, 2=Needs Improvement, 3=Average, 4=Above Average, 5=Excellent)			
Rotation 1	K 4.65 A 4.58	K 4.76 A 4.65	TBD TBD

South College benchmarks: 1. The cohort average will at a minimum be equal to the national average, considered excellent if above the national average; 2. $\geq 95\%$ of students who start Q5 will pass DSE with a score of $\geq 80\%$; 3. The cohort average cumulative GPA will be ≥ 3.0 for the end of the didactic phase, considered excellent if ≥ 3.75 ; and 4. Rotation 1 minimum cohort average will be ≥ 3.0 for preparedness, considered excellent if ≥ 4.5 .

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program, Knoxville and Atlanta campuses, prepares each student exceptionally well for supervised clinical practice experiences (rotations) by leveraging the breadth and depth of medical education and skills taught in the didactic phase. This is supported by all minimum benchmarks being met, and two excellent benchmarks being met. The cohort PACKRAT average for the didactic phase is above the national average, the average didactic cumulative GPA is strong, and the cohort average preceptor ratings for rotation 1 are above the excellent benchmark of 4.5.

3. Provide students with a comprehensive clinical curriculum that prepares them to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam.

The clinical learning phase consists of 8 supervised clinical practice experiences, each approximately 6 weeks long, during which each student applies knowledge from the didactic phase, continues learning in the clinical phase, and acquires essential, hands-on medical skills through patient encounters, preparing for transition to their professional career. This phase involves clinical rotations in inpatient, outpatient, emergency department, and operating room settings across a range of specialties. Each student returns to South College at the end of every clinical rotation (EOR) for targeted learning experiences and to demonstrate knowledge and skills through end-of-rotation exams, case presentations, and hands-on practical exams.

[View the detailed Clinical Curriculum](#)

Preceptor Feedback for Student Assessment of Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences, Classes of 2023-2025*.						
Area Assessed	Class of 2023 Knox	Class of 2023 ATL	Class of 2024 Knox	Class of 2024 ATL	Class of 2025 Knox	Class of 2025 ATL
Medical Interview	4.86	4.85	4.88	4.86	4.88	4.83
Physical Examination	4.84	4.82	4.83	4.82	4.85	4.81
Oral Case Presentation	4.85	4.84	4.85	4.81	4.85	4.82
Written Patient Record	4.89	4.84	4.87	4.81	4.90	4.83
Knowledge of Diagnostic Studies	4.82	4.80	4.84	4.78	4.85	4.78
Ability to Perform Clinical Procedures	4.88	4.85	4.86	4.82	4.87	4.82
Problem-solving/Critical Thinking	4.85	4.82	4.86	4.79	4.88	4.80
Factual Knowledge & Concepts	4.84	4.81	4.86	4.80	4.87	4.80
Assessment/Differential Diagnosis	4.83	4.81	4.85	4.80	4.86	4.80
Ability to Form a Management Plan	4.82	4.81	4.86	4.78	4.85	4.79
Ability to Implement Management Plan	4.86	4.82	4.86	4.80	4.87	4.81
Relating to Colleagues	4.93	4.93	4.95	4.92	4.96	4.92
Relating to Patients	4.93	4.92	4.95	4.91	4.95	4.91
Understanding the Role of PA	4.95	4.93	4.96	4.93	4.96	4.93
Self-confidence	4.87	4.87	4.87	4.84	4.86	4.87
Reliability and Dependability	4.95	4.93	4.95	4.93	4.96	4.93
Professionalism	4.92	4.90	4.92	4.90	4.93	4.90
Internal Medicine Rotation	4.79	4.82	4.87	4.79	4.88	4.72
Surgery Rotation	4.80	4.74	4.80	4.73	4.81	4.81
Family Medicine Rotation	4.92	4.93	4.91	4.83	4.91	4.85
Emergency Medicine Rotation	4.90	4.87	4.86	4.90	4.86	4.90
Women’s Health Rotation	4.95	4.87	4.94	4.89	4.97	4.88

Pediatric Rotation	4.83	4.86	4.88	4.92	4.82	4.89
Behavioral Health Rotation	4.95	4.89	4.96	4.89	4.99	4.84
Elective Rotation	4.87	4.88	4.88	4.85	4.89	4.86

*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 minimum benchmark is a cohort average score of ≥ 3.0 across all areas. The excellence benchmark is a cohort average score of ≥ 4.5 .*

The Clinical Summative Review (CSR) course (taken within the last 4 months of the program) is comprehensive and designed to ensure that each student has met defined [program competencies](#), which relate to the knowledge (standardized, multiple-choice board-style exam), clinical and technical skills, and attitudes suitable for clinical practice upon graduation. A student must pass this course with an $\geq 80\%$ and each summative assessment to graduate.

The PA program’s curriculum is designed to strive for educational excellence and to offer students the most current, best-practice, and evidence-based medical knowledge and skills. The program collects quantitative and qualitative data (feedback from faculty, adjuncts, students, preceptors, and advisory committees) throughout each phase and conducts ongoing self-assessment and critical analysis using multiple data sets to identify strengths and areas needing improvement, informing action plans.

Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) Pass Rates and Employment Rates for the South College Physician Assistant Classes of 2020-2024.			
(K) Knoxville, (A) Atlanta			
Areas Assessed	2023	2024	2025
South College first-time takers' pass rate	K 92% A 94%	K 94% A 96%	K 96%* A 94%*
National first-time takers' pass rate	92%	92%	91%^
South College all takers pass rate	100%	100%	TBD
National all-takers pass rate	89%	89%	88%^
Number of SC students tested	K 77 A 79	K 79 A 79	K 82* A 79*
Number of National students tested	11,856	12,424	13,145
Of those who passed PANCE - Employment rate of South College graduates as a PA*	100%	100%	TBD

^ The official national average cannot be provided until the entire 2026 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 2025 is compared to the national pass rate published for 2026.

*2 graduates from the Knoxville campus and one from Atlanta, co 2025, will take their PANCE for the first time after this report has been posted.

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 2025.

The South College benchmarks: 1. PANCE outcomes, at a minimum, for the first-time taker's PANCE pass rate is equal to the national average, considered excellent if greater than the national average. 2. A 100% of graduates who pass the PANCE are employed as a PA-C within 1 year.

Conclusions based on data analysis: The South College PA program, Knoxville and Atlanta campus, provides each student with a comprehensive clinical curriculum, where the average cohort student ratings by preceptors for knowledge, ability, and skills for each rotation are above our excellent benchmark of 4.5. These excellent average ratings for our clinical students indicate they are competent healthcare students ready to become providers. Furthermore, the clinical curriculum and CSR during this phase continue to prepare students to pass the PANCE to become hired as PAs within a year of passing. This demonstrates that we have been at or above the national average over the last 3 years, with 100% of students employed as a PA-C within a year after passing the PANCE.

4. **Prepare students to make significant contributions to the communities that they serve.**

The mission of the South College Master of Health Science Physician Assistant Program is to educate highly qualified physician assistants to become competent, compassionate, and comprehensive healthcare providers for clinical practice in rural and urban areas, with a focus on underserved communities. In support of this mission, many of the program’s graduates practice medicine at primary care clinical sites serving medically underserved populations, 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 lifelong learning skills and professional development.

Student Community Service Hours Combined for both Campuses, Classes of 2023-2025.			
Community Service Hours	Class of 2023	Class of 2024	Class of 2025
Average	58.8	58	56
Minimum	50.0	50	50
Maximum	250.5	244	124
Total Hours Served	9,176	9,074	9,210
Due to your completion of community service hours, do you intend to volunteer during your PA career?	n/a	Knox-Yes-67% Atl-Yes-71%	Knox-Yes-76% Atl-Yes-73%

South College requires that all students complete at least 50 hours of community service.

**Starting with the class of 2024, we added a question to their end-of-program (exit) survey on their intent to serve their community as a PA due to the service they acquired during the program. The minimum benchmark is at 50%, stated “Yes”, and excellence is considered ≥90%.*

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program, Knoxville and Atlanta campuses provide students with community service opportunities that support rural and urban medically underserved communities. Students have shown they on average go beyond the minimum community service requirement of 50 hours, with a majority intending to serve their community during their PA career due to the service completed during the program.

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 a distant 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.

- During most of the year (9 months), **Knoxville SFR** is 9.7 (170/17.5). In the Fall Quarter, the PA program is at maximum capacity with 3 concurrent cohorts of 85 students each, for a total of 255 students. During this 25% of the year (Fall Quarter), Knoxville SFR is 14.6 (255/17.5)
- During most of the year (9 months), **Atlanta SFR** is 9.4 (170/18.0). In the Fall Quarter (3 months), the PA program is at maximum capacity with 3 concurrent cohorts. During this Fall Quarter, Atlanta SFR is 14.2 (255/18.0).

The program focuses on ensuring sufficient content-area experts to teach the depth and breadth of the curriculum. The program faculty members have expertise in a broad range of subjects, including, but not limited to, clinical pharmacology, family medicine, women's health, internal medicine, emergency medicine, pediatrics, geriatrics, dermatology, endocrinology, behavioral medicine, general surgery, orthopedics, anatomy, public health, and research. In addition to the program faculty, the PA program has an outstanding group of medical professionals (MDs, DOs, PAs, and NPs) in the community who complement the program faculty's knowledge base. The program uses approximately 20-30 adjunct faculty members throughout the didactic and clinical phase, serving as lecturers in the classroom and as proctors for small-group, hands-on, and clinical laboratory experiences.

- According to the South College Annual Performance Appraisals completed in 2025, all current faculty at the Knoxville and Atlanta campuses had an overall rating of “meet or exceeding performance” from their Annual Performance Appraisals.

Survey Item – 2025 academic year	Knoxville	Atlanta
The program's current number of faculty are sufficient to meet student needs. <i>(End of Didactic Survey, co 2026)</i>	4.26	3.99
Faculty delivered course content and skills that built upon previously achieved student learning (course or quarter sequencing). <i>(End of Didactic Survey, co 2026)</i>	4.28	4.39
Overall, due to the didactic phase of the program, I feel prepared to start clinical rotations. <i>(End of Didactic Survey, co 2026)</i>	4.24	4.14
The program's current number of faculty are sufficient to meet student needs. <i>(End of Program Survey, co 2025)</i>	3.81	3.25
The faculty were effective in preparing me for entry into the clinical practice of medicine. <i>(End of Program Survey, co 2025)</i>	3.92	3.76

The South College minimum benchmark is ≥ 3.0 , and excellence is considered ≥ 4.5 .

The PA program has sufficient administrative and technical support staff members to assist the faculty in accomplishing their assigned tasks. Most staff are assigned to the PA program full-time, with one clinical administrative position part-time.

Survey Item – 2025 academic year	Knoxville	Atlanta
The program's current number of staff are sufficient to meet student needs. <i>(End of Didactic Survey, co 2026)</i>	3.99	4.10
The program's current number of staff are sufficient to meet student needs. <i>(End of Program Survey, co 2025)</i>	3.70	3.29

The South College minimum benchmark is ≥ 3.0 , and excellence is considered ≥ 4.5 .

Supervised clinical practice experiences (rotations) occur under the supervision of board-certified physicians, certified PAs, certified NPs, or other licensed professionals who are licensed in the state where they practice. The PA program has active clinical sites across many states, with >1,400 rotations covering internal medicine, surgery, family medicine/geriatrics, emergency medicine, women's health, pediatrics, clinical psychiatry and behavioral health, and elective disciplines (the most common are orthopedics, specialized surgery, and dermatology).

Survey Item – 2025 academic year	Knoxville	Atlanta
Student Evaluation of the Preceptor and Site, clinical phase, co 2025 (range is across 8 rotations)	4.65 - 4.89	4.63 - 4.88
Preceptors were available for guidance or questions to improve gaps in knowledge, understanding, or skills. <i>(End of Program Survey, co 2025)</i>	4.25	3.81
The preceptors were effective in preparing me for entry into clinical practice of medicine. <i>(End of Program Survey, co 2025)</i>	4.25	3.95

The South College minimum benchmark is ≥ 3.0 , and excellence is considered ≥ 4.5 .

Conclusion based on data analysis: The South College PA program, on the Knoxville and Atlanta campuses, has sufficient faculty and staff, as determined by the STF ratio, their licensure and experience, annual performance evaluations, and student ratings in each phase of the program. This provides evidence that the program offers effective education and training to prepare students to become PA providers. Furthermore, the preceptors' effectiveness in preparation for clinical practice, rated by the co 2025 students, met the program benchmark.

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 October 2027. The review date is contingent upon continued compliance with the Accreditation *Standards* and ARC-PA policy.

The accreditation history of [South College-Knoxville](#) can be viewed on the ARC-PA website.

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.