PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT, M.M.S.

Saint Louis University’s Physician Assistant (PA) Master of Medical Science (M.M.S.) is a 27-month, year-round graduate program with a rigorous didactic and clinical curriculum that provides a broad foundation in medicine and surgery.

As one of the first universities in the country to offer a PA program, Saint Louis University has maintained a tradition of academic excellence and earned a national reputation as a leader in PA education. Educational facilities at SLU provide an exceptional learning environment and include a simulated medical office with eight exam rooms equipped with cameras for recording and reviewing student performance.

The mission of Saint Louis University’s PA program is to educate individuals to become competent, compassionate physician assistants dedicated to excellence in health care and to the service of humanity.

Traditional pre-PA tracks can be found in many Doisy College of Health Sciences (DCHS) programs (https://catalog.slu.edu/colleges-schools/health-sciences/). In addition, DCHS proudly offers the direct-entry PA Scholars option (https://www.slu.edu/doisy/degrees/undergraduate/pre-pa-scholars.php) for eligible incoming freshmen who are interested in the opportunity to secure a spot in the SLU PA program upon graduation from a specific pre-PA degree program.

SLU also offers the M.M.S./M.P.H. dual-degree option for students who are passionate about pursuing both PA and public health interests.

PA students at SLU are involved in community service, including working at the student-run free clinic, the Health Resource Center (https://www.slu.edu/medicine/clinics-community/hrc/).

Graduates of SLU’s PA program are eligible to sit for the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE).

Annual NCCPA PANCE Exam Performance Summary (https://www.slu.edu/doisy/degrees/program-pdfs/pance-report-0318.pdf)


Curriculum Overview

SLU’s PA curriculum offers a broad foundation in the medical and surgical disciplines. The principal faculty of the PA program offers a breadth of background and experience in health care and education. In addition, area physicians, PAs and other health professionals and experts may lecture in the PA program, along with science faculty from within the University.

Clinical and Research Opportunities

Clinical education is an essential component of SLU’s PA program. Students begin their clinical education after completing four semesters of didactic education. Through clinical rotations in the major disciplines of medicine and surgery, PA students at SLU learn to integrate clinical knowledge and skills with active patient care. Saint Louis University is clinically affiliated with numerous hospitals, clinics, and medical and surgical practices.

PA students will be assigned to complete a maximum of three out-of-town rotations each year. These are at least 60 miles outside of St. Louis but are regional in nature, typically within a five-hour drive of campus. In some locations, the PA Student Society (SLUPAS) maintains a list of previously available housing to aid students when sent out of town. Students may request to be placed in locations where they have housing available, although this is not guaranteed.

Clinical Practice Experiences

Saint Louis University is a member of the National Council for State Authorization and Reciprocity Act (NC-SARA), which allows students to complete a portion of their education in a different state.

PA students work with clinical preceptors and actively participate in patient care in six-week and three four-week supervised clinical experiences in the following disciplines:

- **Clinical Elective:** This is a student-choice rotation in terms of medical or surgical specialty/subspecialty. Specific clinical disciplines may be chosen based on student interests or what students believe would best augment their existing clinical knowledge and skills.

- **Emergency Medicine:** This clinical experience explores patient assessment and management in an emergency department setting. It includes patient care for acute and emergent encounters with an emphasis on focused patient assessment, precise diagnosis and emergent treatment.

- **Evidence-Based Medicine Clerkship:** This is a student-choice rotation in terms of the medical or surgical specialty/subspecialty, in which the application of evidence-based medicine in clinical practice is highlighted.

- **Family Medicine:** This clinical experience provides students an opportunity to gain outpatient/ambulatory primary care experience in one of the various community settings. It includes the daily care of patients presenting for chronic, acute and/or preventative visits across different age groups.

- **Surgery:** Students actively participate in a surgical practice that exposes them to concepts and principles that characterize the operating room and surgical patient care. They will participate in pre-operative, intra-operative and post-operative care during this rotation.

- **Internal Medicine:** During this clinical rotation, students participate in direct patient care in inpatient and/or outpatient adult medicine. The clinical experience expands on the understanding of the complexities and interrelationships of disease processes with diagnostic and therapeutic collaboration, as well as patient assessments, plans, oral patient presentations and clinical documentation.

- **Pediatrics:** This four-week clinical rotation provides practical clinical experience in the recognition and management of common pediatric problems, as well as health maintenance. The clerkship includes assessment and treatment of infants, children and adolescents with attention to acute care visits, well-baby and well-child care, preventative pediatrics and parental counseling.

- **Psychiatry/Behavioral Medicine:** This four-week clinical rotation provides experience working with patients across the spectrum of mental health in a psychiatric and/or behavioral medicine setting.

- **Women’s Health:** This four-week clinical experience encompasses the fundamentals of obstetrics/gynecology/women’s health including pre-pregnancy, prenatal, postpartum and general gynecologic care.
In some cases, students may be allowed to develop up to four of their
own clerkships, following a careful screening process and programmatic
approval.

Certification and Licensure
PAs are certified nationally and licensed by the state. After graduation
from an ARC-PA accredited program, PAs can sit for the Physician
Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE). The PANCE is administered
by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants
(NCCPA), which is the nationally recognized certification organization for
PAs. The NCCPA assures high standards in the profession, and provides
the patient/consumer with safeguards and the employer with evidence
of competency. Saint Louis University PA program graduates have
consistently performed above the national average on the PANCE.

National certification via the NCCPA is required for clinical practice as a
PA. Certified PAs are also required to demonstrate continued competency
via mandatory continuing education as well as successful completion of
the national PA recertification exam every 10 years.

State licensure is also required for clinical practice as a PA. Specific
requirements for licensure vary by state. Depending on state-specific
requirements, the agreement between the PA and the collaborating
physician (MD or DO) may be maintained with the state licensure
documents.

Note: Many state regulatory and governing organizations will not grant
a license, registration or other professional practice documents if one
has been convicted of a felony, or in some cases, a misdemeanor.
Prospective applicants are encouraged to consult with the state licensing
organization for more detailed information before applying.

Careers
PAs are employed in essentially every medical and surgical specialty and
subspecialty in which MDs and DOs are employed. PAs work in hospitals,
clinics, offices and other settings. PAs obtain histories, perform physical
exams, order diagnostic tests and imaging, interpret the results, diagnose
treat illnesses, counsel and educate patients, assist in surgery and
prescribe medications.

Some PAs work in primary care, such as family medicine, internal
medicine, pediatrics and women’s health, while others work in various
medical and surgical specialties and subspecialties. SLU’s PA graduates
can be found in hospitals, clinics, private offices, community health
centers and many other settings.

Admission Requirements
Baccalaureate Degree
Applicants to SLU’s PA program should possess or be on track to a
baccalaureate degree earned by the May prior to matriculation. An
exception may be considered if students will earn an August degree, have
completed all prerequisites and have three credits or fewer to complete
during the summer.

Sufficient GPA
Applicants must have a science GPA of at least 3.00 and an overall GPA
of at least 3.00. These are considered minimum GPAs, not competitive
GPAs. Average GPAs are typically greater than 3.50.
Prerequisite coursework includes:

- Medical terminology (1-3 credits)
- Statistics (3 credits) *science-based statistics is preferred
- College chemistry I and II (8 credits)
- Organic chemistry I and II (6-8 credits)
- Microbiology (3-4 credits)
- Vertebrate or human anatomy (3-4 credits)
- Vertebrate or human physiology (3-4 credits)
- A combined Anatomy and Physiology I and II (6-8 credits) will be
  accepted in place of separate anatomy and physiology courses.
- Genetics (3-4 credits)

Students cannot transfer into the PA program. No advanced placement is
allowed for any coursework, degree or experience.

All prerequisite coursework must be completed by the May prior to
matriculation. All science prerequisite courses must be those for
science majors. If offered, accompanying laboratories are highly
recommended. Only grades of C or better are acceptable for science and
math prerequisite courses; grades of C- or below are not accepted and
grades of B or better are preferred. Prerequisite coursework should be
completed within seven years of application. Community college and
online courses are typically accepted but not considered competitive
(except medical terminology). Coursework at a four-year college or
university is recommended.

The GRE general test is not required. However, if submitting scores, the
SLU PA program GRE code is 4475. (Do not use the Saint Louis University
code; a specific SLU PA program code must be used with the CASPA
applications.)

Patient Care Experience
Applicants to the PA program must have acquired a minimum of 500
hours of direct patient care experience by the time the CASPA application
is submitted. Hours earned after this, regardless of when the file is
reviewed by the PA admissions committee, are not considered. This
experience varies and can be acquired on a full- or part-time basis. Direct
patient care experience requiring certification and providing monetary
compensation is most competitive. This could include work as a CNA,
EMT, scribe or patient care technician, for example. The average applicant
has at least 2,000 hours.

Unless you are already closely working with a PA, shadowing a PA is
important and can enhance your application but is not considered health
care experience. Only 100 student clinical hours (obtained while fulfilling
the required components of an educational program or course) can
count toward the 500 hours of health care experience needed. Volunteer
hours are not considered competitive health care experience and often
cannot be counted towards the 500-hour minimum. If volunteer hours are
accepted, only a maximum of 250 hours may count.

Background Check
Students in this program are required to obtain a criminal background
check and undergo drug testing. A positive background check or drug
screen could have significant consequences for the student, including
forfeiture of any or all clinical rotations and/or inability to complete
the program. The potential to sit for the Physician Assistant National
Certifying Exam (PANCE) may also be impacted.

Additionally, many state regulatory and governing organizations will
not grant a license, registration or other similar professional practice
documents if there is a positive criminal background check or drug screen.

**Application Process**

Apply through the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (https://caspa.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login) (CASPA) between mid-April and Nov. 1. The PA supplemental application, found in the CASPA Program Materials section, must also be completed during the same time frame. CASPA will not send your application materials without the completion of this section. Payment for the supplemental application processing is made by going to SLU Marketplace (https://billpay.slu.edu/C20197_ustores/web/classic/?MOBILE_REDIRECT=false).

CASPA applications and PA supplemental applications are reviewed beginning June 1. It is recommended to submit all application materials by Aug. 1.

Letters of reference submitted to CASPA should be from people who know applicants well, either professionally or academically, such as a job supervisor, professor or academic adviser. Please note: The PA program requires three letters of reference, even though CASPA completes an application with only two.

Applications completed and verified by CASPA will not be reviewed without the supplemental fee or appropriate fee waiver.

A limited number of processing fee waivers will be available for applicants experiencing severe financial hardship. To be considered for a fee waiver, applicants must email a request to pasupplemental@slu.edu. The request should outline the reasons for the request and the nature of the financial hardship. Requests must be emailed by July 31 to be considered.

**PA Scholars Program**

Saint Louis University also offers the PA Scholars program, which is a competitive freshman direct-entry program into the PA program after completing a specified undergraduate degree from the Doisy College of Health Sciences and adhering to specified program criteria.

**Requirements for International Degree Holders**

Graduates of an international college or university, with the exception of Canadian institutions, must meet all prerequisites and must have a minimum of 30 credits, or 10 courses, of college coursework from an accredited US university or college. Full-time enrollment in a four-year institution is recommended, but community college coursework is accepted. No online coursework is accepted. The US coursework must include: Organic Chemistry I and II, Human Anatomy and Physiology (or A&P I and A&P II), and a minimum of three social/behavioral courses to include Psychology (with other options such as Sociology, Anthropology, History, etc.).

International medical graduates with 500 hours of health care experience outside of the United States must also acquire at least 250 hours of patient care experience in the United States by the time of application.

Applicants whose native language is other than English are required to take the TOEFL® Internet-based Test by Nov. 1. A combined minimum score of 100 is required, along with minimum component scores of 22-Reading, 22-Listening, 26-Speaking and 24-Writing. Scores should be submitted to CASPA and to the PA Program. The school code is R6629. The department code for health science is 0601.

**Application Deadline**

Applications for this program close Nov. 1, meaning that applications must be completely verified by CASPA by Nov. 1. Due to this verification process, it is recommended that applications are submitted to CASPA by Oct. 15 to meet the Nov. 1 deadline. Applicants who have met all requirements are encouraged to apply early, between June and August. Completed applications are reviewed in the order applications are received.

**Interview Process**

Personal interviews occur between October and February. Four to five interview dates are scheduled with 18 to 20 applicants each date. Highly qualified applicants may be invited to an interview three to four weeks prior to the scheduled interview dates.

**Selection Factors**

The committee on admissions will select students for the program based on the overall strength of the applicant relative to the applicant pool. The following areas are of primary consideration:

- Academic potential as determined by the number, quality (i.e. taken at a four-year institution) and completion of science and prerequisite courses and overall degree by the time of CASPA application, as well as grade performance in these courses and GPAs
- Motivation for and familiarity with the role of the PA
- Quality and duration of prior health care experience
- Alignment with the mission of the SLU PA program
- Alignment with the program’s diversity and inclusion goals
- Leadership potential and community service
- Maturity
- Ability to make sound professional and personal judgments
- Compassion and empathy
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral and written communications skills
- Capacity for performance of the technical standards required of a PA
- Potential for success in the SLU program and in the PA profession

**Scholarships and Financial Aid**

For more information about Saint Louis University scholarships and financial aid, please visit the Office of Student Financial Services online at www.slu.edu/financial-aid (https://www.slu.edu/financial-aid/).

**Accreditation**

The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant has granted "Accreditation-Continued” to the physician assistant program sponsored by Saint Louis University. Accreditation-Continued is an accreditation status granted when a currently accredited program is in compliance with the ARC-PA standards.

Accreditation remains in effect until the program closes or withdraws from the accreditation process or until accreditation is withdrawn for
failure to comply with the standards. The approximate date for the next validation review of the program by the ARC-PA will be June 2023. 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 (http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation-history-saint-louis-university/).

Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA)
3325 Paddocks Parkway, Suite 345
Suwanee, GA 30024
770-476-1224
http://www.arc-pa.org

Learning Outcomes

These program learning outcomes reflect outcomes specific to the university Higher Learning Commission (HLC) assessment process:

1. Graduates will be able to communicate with patients for effective clinical encounters.
2. Graduates will be able to use the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate patient medical problems.
3. Graduates will be able to demonstrate respect for patients and other medical professionals as a component of professionalism in medical practice.
4. Graduates will be able to demonstrate core medical knowledge in the provision of patient care.
5. Graduates will understand how to apply the Jesuit value of “cura personalis” when treating patients.

Program Competencies

Students matriculating in the SLU PA program undertake a difficult, rewarding and life-changing journey. The program has high expectations of its students, and the students are expected to live up to the challenge. As students, and afterward as health care providers, there is great responsibility placed upon them.

The SLU PA program competencies help prepare them for this responsibility and are specific to entry-level practice expectations. SLU’s competencies align with the national competencies for practicing PAs. The national PA competencies were devised collaboratively by the four national PA organizations: Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA), American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) and the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).

Students are expected to work toward the attainment of the program competencies as they progress through the curriculum. Certain patterns and/or levels of attainment are expected along the course of the didactic and clinical phases of the program. Aligned with the national PA competencies, our student competencies include six major components: medical knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, patient care, professionalism, practice-based learning and improvement, and systems-based practice. Each of these has multiple subcomponents correlating to specific competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required of our PA students. These can be mapped to our curriculum and, with various assessment tools in place, we track competency attainment for each student.

The competencies are interwoven with and complementary to our program goals, learning outcomes and instructional objectives and are fundamental to the curricular and operational framework of our program.

SLU PA Program Competencies (https://www.slu.edu/doisy/degrees/program-pdfs/pa-program-competencies.pdf)

Effectiveness in Meeting Program Goals

The SLU PA program has a long and rich history of excellence in didactic and clinical PA education. The program goals interact within the context of the program mission and broadly capture many of the details and components that come together to create the curricular and operational framework of our program. Program competencies, learning outcomes and instructional objectives are interwoven as part of the support for this framework.

Information about our SLU PA program goals and success in meeting them is outlined here: Outline of SLU PA Program Effectiveness in Meeting Program Goals (http://www.slu.edu/doisy/degrees/program-pdfs/pa-program-description-of-goals.pdf)

Requirements

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Performance Standards

During the entirety of the PA program, students are expected to adhere to specific academic and professional standards, which are outlined in the student handbook and policy manual.

As health care professionals, PAs must be sensitive to the value of human dignity. This value is manifested in behaviors and attitudes demonstrating inclusion, sensitivity to the well-being of others and honesty in all endeavors. PA students, therefore, are held to standards of professional behavior in areas including overall conduct, academics, health information, daily interactions with others, clinical compliance, patient encounters, title identification, attire and attendance.

In addition to expectations for professional behavior, PA students must also meet academic standards. The academic expectation is that all PA students maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 and perform at or above 70 percent on exams and other graded components.

SLU PA Program Attrition Rates (https://www.slu.edu/doisy/degrees/program-pdfs/pa-attrition-rate.pdf)

The complex nature of medicine and the condensed educational time frame of the PA program combine to create a curriculum that is very rewarding, yet also rigorous, time-consuming and intense. Whether engaged in classroom and lab activity, reading and studying, or clinical rotation obligations, students should plan to be involved in program requirements all day, every weekday and some weekends for the duration of the program. It is recommended that students do not work during the 27 months they are enrolled in the program. Additionally, students may not work for the PA program nor serve as instructional faculty or clinical/administrative staff.

Technical Standards

SLU PA Program Technical Standards (http://www.slu.edu/doisy/degrees/program-pdfs/pa-program-technical-standards.pdf)

Additional Requirements

1. In keeping with our Jesuit values and program mission, SLU PA students are required to complete community service hours during their time in the program. Required service hours at the PA student-operated free clinic, the HRC (Health Resource Center), can count towards this, in addition to many other options that can count toward service.

2. In addition to a physical examination and health attestation, admitted PA students must meet certain health, immunization and related requirements prior to matriculation throughout the program. Immunization policies are based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended vaccines for health care workers.

3. Students are required to obtain a criminal background check and undergo drug testing before matriculation and again before clinical rotations begin. A positive background check or drug screen could have serious consequences for a student including forfeiture of any or all clinical rotations and/or inability to complete the program. The potential to sit for the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) may also be impacted. Additionally, many state regulatory and governing organizations will not grant a license, registration or other similar professional practice document if there is a positive criminal background check or drug screen.

Withdrawal and Leave of Absence Policies

Withdrawal from any course or modification of the curricular sequence of the PA program is not permitted, except as part of an approved leave of absence. If for any reason a student needs to request a leave of absence, the student should schedule a meeting with the PA program director or a principal faculty member. The student will be guided through the University process for leave of absence and course withdrawal (https://www.slu.edu/financial-aid/paying-your-bill/refunds.php) with help from program faculty and staff.

Despite potential reasons for leaving the program, most fees are non-refundable and tuition refunds usually cannot be granted due to the timing and sequencing of our curriculum. If, however, a tuition refund is applicable, the student will be guided through this process as well. Information on withdrawal and tuition and fee refunds may be found at Student Financial Aid Services.

Roadmap

Roadmaps are recommended semester-by-semester plans of study for programs and assume full-time enrollment unless otherwise noted.

Courses and milestones designated as critical (marked with !) must be completed in the semester listed to ensure a timely graduation. Transfer credit may change the roadmap.

This roadmap should not be used in the place of regular academic advising appointments. All students are encouraged to meet with their advisor/mentor each semester. Requirements, course availability and sequencing are subject to change.

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**Program Notes**

**Phase I**
The didactic phase of the PA program consists of pre-clinical lectures, small group discussions, laboratory sessions and demonstrations. The student studies the basic medical sciences like anatomy and physiology, as well as applied behavioral sciences and the foundations of clinical medicine. Educational material is presented through organ system-based courses which support the integration of complex disease processes with diagnosis and treatment. Rather than discrete courses in pathophysiology and physical examination, the curriculum integrates these components within each system-based course. Phase I coursework also incorporates patient assessment, clinical documentation, genetics and interpretation of appropriate labs, diagnostics and imaging/studies.

**Phase II**
The clinical phase of the PA program includes rotations in internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, emergency medicine, women’s health, family medicine, psychiatry/behavioral medicine and two rotations in clinical specialties of each student’s choice -- clinical elective and EBM clerkship. The PA program assigns sites and preceptors for Phase II. Students are not responsible for developing their own clinical sites or finding their own clinical preceptors. While working under the supervision of a clinical preceptor, the student actively participates in the daily care of patients and will interact with patients of all ages, backgrounds and medical conditions.

When assigned to hospital teaching services, the student functions as an integral member of the inpatient team. The student may interact daily with attending and resident physicians, PAs, medical students and other health care professionals in practice or in training. When assigned to ambulatory care or outpatient clinical practices, the student may function in a one-on-one relationship with the physician or PA who serves as instructor and supervisor. Students will complete rotations in medically underserved areas and should expect to complete at least two rotations at an assigned out-of-town site. Finding and planning for appropriate housing for out-of-town clinical rotations, if needed, and paying for housing, are responsibilities of the PA student.

**Contact Us**

For additional admission questions please contact:

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Recruitment Specialist
314-977-2570
dchs@health.slu.edu