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# 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 (PA) Studies. It should be viewed as an adjunct to Shenandoah University's [Graduate Catalog](#) and the [Physician Assistant Program Student Handbook](#), which contain specific information regarding the university and related policies. (These document hyperlinks can be found on our [website](#))

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 a faculty advisor to ensure these requirements are fulfilled.

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

PAs are medical professionals who diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medications, and often serve as a patient's principal healthcare provider. With thousands of hours of medical training, PAs are versatile and collaborative. PAs exercise autonomy in decision-making and provide a wide range of diagnostic and therapeutic services including prescribing medication. The role of the PA includes provision of primary and specialty care in medical and surgical practices located in a variety of settings and geographic locations. PAs practice in every state and in every medical setting and specialty, improving healthcare access and quality.

The Shenandoah University Physician Assistant (SUPA) program is a graduate entry-level professional course of study enabling individuals who hold baccalaureate degrees to become PAs. The program is designed to prepare graduates for practice with emphasis on service to medically underserved populations and the team approach to the delivery of healthcare. 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 PA profession.

### **Purpose and Goals**

The purpose of the PA 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 SUPA program will demonstrate the following:

1. Entry-level proficiencies necessary for high quality, cost-effective practice as a primary care PA 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 patient education that benefit patients, caregivers, families, and communities.

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 PA profession.
7. A team and community-oriented approach to the delivery of health care utilizing appropriate modern technologies for the benefit of patients, caregivers, families, and communities.

## **Mission Statement**

*Transforming Healthcare Through Innovative Education*

## **Core Values**

- **Promoting Excellence** in education that extends learning beyond the classroom, develops research skills, and results in high-quality patient care
- **Cultivating Leadership** through professional values and engagement in the healthcare system
- **Sparking Curiosity** that fosters the skills needed to meet the demands of the evolving healthcare landscape
- **Supporting Advocacy** that empowers those in need
- **Integrating Service** into actions for the betterment of our communities
- **Upholding Respect** for the rights, dignity, well-being, and integrity of all individuals

## **Curriculum Design**

The curriculum design, offered in didactic and experiential components, 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 PA. The didactic curriculum offers multiple modalities for learning, which include self-directed study, recitation, lecture, integrated clinical cases and laboratory experiences. These modalities assist students in developing the necessary skills to be self-directed life-long learners and effectively apply what they learn in the clinical setting. The clinical curriculum provides core primary care and other learning experiences where students apply knowledge and skills in a variety of patient care settings under the supervision and mentoring of licensed health care providers.

## **Program Delivery Model**

The Shenandoah University PA program is offered on a full-time basis only at two sites, Winchester and at Scholar Plaza, Loudoun County. The length of the program is eight semesters (30 months). The delivery model is designed to prepare students for a rapidly changing healthcare environment where simple memorization of facts and figures is insufficient for effective clinical practice. Delivery of content includes face-to-face, asynchronous online, and video-teleconferencing. Learning is accomplished through independent study and preparation, lecture and discussions, small-group case-based exercises, and practical application. Inter-professional learning opportunities are integrated throughout the curriculum. 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.

Since the SUPA program will use computer technology in the delivery of the curriculum, all PA students must be computer literate. The Shenandoah University PA program uses a technology program, which provides a laptop computer, an iPad, and technology support to each student. Participation in this program is mandatory.

Students are expected to adjust their non-curricular demands in order to complete the degree requirements. Employment is not recommended while attending the Shenandoah University PA program.

### **Early Assurance Program**

High school students interested in applying to Shenandoah's Early Assurance Program should review the information and requirements provided online at the [Physician Assistant Early Assurance Pathway](#) site.

### **Shenandoah University (SU) Articulation Agreement**

An [articulation agreement](#) between SU's undergraduate College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and our graduate School of Health Professions (SHP) provides a pathway to the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies for any currently full-time enrolled SU student earning a baccalaureate degree from the university. A reserved number of seats is set aside for those students who meet all the same admission requirements as regular applicants.

### **Dual Physician Assistant Studies/Master of Public Health (PA/MPH) Program**

Students who pursue a dual PA/MPH graduate program of study will obtain a more holistic, global, and epidemiological perspective on the health care system overall. This can better prepare them for preventative medicine and international work while saving both time and money in concurrently completing this program with fifteen credits of overlapping coursework.

### **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 <http://www.caspaonline.org>, including official transcripts from all institutions of higher education attended and three recommendations.
2. Preference will be given to candidates who can demonstrate an alignment with the mission and core values of the program via a required supplemental essay. Candidates will be asked to choose three of the Shenandoah University PA Program's Core Values and, in a total of 500 words or less, explain how they have demonstrated those three core values in action.
3. As a part of the CASPA application, candidates will prepare an admissions narrative, which must be evaluated as of graduate student quality by our admissions committee. Candidates are to explain why they are interested in becoming a PA and demonstrate that they have an in-depth understanding of the PA role in the health care system. In addition, candidates are encouraged to use this narrative to explain any aspects of their application that may require clarification (e.g., gaps in education or work).

Direct health-care experience (voluntary or paid) or observational/shadowing experience with a PA is not required but highly recommended to be documented within the CASPA application. **Please note: Although experience updates can be made directly to your CASPA application once submitted, we cannot guarantee that they will be reviewed in time by the admissions committee.**

## Academic Requirements

To be considered for regular admission, applicants must have:

- a. A bachelor's degree from a regionally-accredited college or university recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or through the World Education Services (WES) international education organization ([www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)).
- b. Minimum 3.0 overall cumulative, overall science, and SUPA Program prerequisite Grade Point Averages (GPAs)

An applicant with an overall cumulative or science GPA less than 3.0 but greater than 2.80 and who has completed a minimum of 15 semester hours of relevant graduate work with a 3.0 or better GPA, may be considered. See FAQs posted on the SUPA website for the definition of relevant graduate work.

Note: Average GPAs for students admitted to the SUPA Program have been over 3.5 for the past several years.

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

### Prerequisite Courses

<u>Course</u>	<u>Semesters</u>	<u>Minimum Credits</u>
Human Anatomy and Physiology with lab	2	8
General (or Intro.) Chemistry with lab	1	4
General (or Intro.) Biochemistry (or Organic Chemistry w/lab)	1	3
General (or Intro.) Microbiology with lab	1	4
Abnormal Psychology	1	3
Developmental Psychology (Child/Life Span/Human Dev.)	1	3
Mathematics (preferably statistics)	1	3
Medical Terminology	1	1-3

### Important Notes

- In order to satisfy prerequisites, courses must be completed with a grade of C or better at a regionally-accredited college or university recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or World Education Services (WES) In order to be competitive, however, it is strongly recommended that prerequisites be completed with a grade of A or B.
- Science courses must be current within ten (10) years of application. The program strongly encourages the Human Anatomy & Physiology prerequisites to be completed within the past 5 years and both semesters taken at the same institution.
- Candidates may not use Advanced Placement (AP) or College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams to satisfy science prerequisites.
- SUPA will accept "P" or related grades as satisfying any of the program's academic prerequisites for courses taken during the following Covid timeframe: Spring Semester 2020 - Spring Semester 2021. Grades reported as Failing (F) or as Incomplete (I) will not be considered as fulfilling prerequisites.
- **Generally, online/distance education formats are strongly discouraged for the science courses that require a laboratory component.** Such online courses including laboratory components that were transitioned to an online format during the above Covid timeframe will be accepted.

- In some cases, work experience specific to the science course older than 10 years may substitute for repeating the course. Upload a formal request, a supervisor letter, and a resume to your CASPA application for review. We are unable to review these requests in advance of application to SU.
- The human anatomy and physiology sequence (A&P) should be taken at the same university to ensure continuity and must cover all body systems. Comparative anatomy, vertebrate anatomy, functional anatomy, animal physiology, anatomy and physiology designed for specific disciplines, or fundamentals of anatomy and physiology courses are not counted toward the A&P requirement.
- Candidates may take anatomy and physiology as separate courses provided both have laboratory components, both have a human, comprehensive focus, and both have a minimum of 4 semester (or equivalent) credit hours.
- If organic chemistry is taken instead of biochemistry, the course must include a lab.
- A medical terminology proficiency exam will be administered during summer orientation. Failure to meet the minimum benchmark will require a formal remediation plan to be completed during the first summer semester.
- The program does not offer academic credit for experiential learning/work experience.

All applicants are asked to read and adhere to the [CASPA Admissions Code of Cooperation](#) available on the CASPA website.

## **Application Process & Timeline**

The SUPA Program processes an individual's verified CASPA application once it's received and considered **complete** by the program. An applicant's file must meet the following requirements:

1. All three references received by CASPA.
2. Plan for completing outstanding prerequisites is listed at the bottom part of the CASPA electronic transcript to include term, institute name, and course details. Typically, applications are less competitive if there are more than two outstanding prerequisites left to complete in the spring term of the year the student intends to begin the PA Program.

## **International Students**

In addition, international students must:

1. Submit an independent course-to-course evaluation by the World Education Services international education organization ([www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)) for foreign transcripts. The program will add this coursework to your CASPA-calculated GPA to attain your overall cumulative, science, and prerequisite GPAs.
2. To satisfy English language proficiency requirements for regular admission to the School of Health Professions - Non-Native English Speaker (NNES) students must achieve one of the following:
  - 83+ on Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
  - 53+ on Pearson Test of English (PTE)
  - 55+ (on pre-July 2019) or 105+ Duolingo English Test (DET)
  - At least 48 credit hours with a cumulative GPA of 2.5 in a post-secondary institution where English is the language of instruction

Note: Please refer to SU's Evidence of [English Language Proficiency link](#) for international graduate students.

## **Application Review**

The application review will include evaluation of the following 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 SUPA program's mission, values, and curriculum delivery:

1. Overall cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) as calculated by CASPA
2. Overall science GPA as calculated by CASPA
3. SUPA Program Prerequisite GPA
4. Number of outstanding prerequisites and plan for completion
5. References – overall scores and knowledge of candidate
6. Quality of narrative and supplemental essays submitted via CASPA
7. Quality and quantity of prior direct care and health related experiences
8. Commitment to people-oriented service and underserved areas
9. Extracurricular activities – with focus on community and professional leadership, and service

**Note: It is the applicant's responsibility to check CASPA and our current website to make sure all requirements and documents are received in a timely manner in order to meet SUPA's deadline.**

## **Interviews**

After application review, the most promising candidates are invited to participate in an interview to assess interpersonal and communication skills, maturity, as well as the understanding and commitment to the PA career and to SUPA's mission and values. This interview also provides an opportunity to determine if our program is the best fit for the candidate's graduate studies.

Candidates will complete a form at the end of their interview day designating their site preference of the Winchester Health Professions Campus or the Leesburg Scholar Plaza, Loudoun site. Site preference will not be used as a factor in the selection process, is not guaranteed, and will be offered based on availability.

There are sixty seats available for the program. In order to increase chances of acceptance, early application is strongly encouraged as typically less seats are available to candidates who interview later in the admissions cycle. Candidates are not permitted to select their interview date. The following schedule will assist you with planning:

CASPA opens	<b>April 30, 2021</b>
Application completed and e-submitted to CASPA	<b>September 1, 2021</b>
Verified application and all supporting materials due	<b>October 1, 2021</b>
Interview top candidates	<b>September 10, October 1, November 5, 2021</b>
Commitment response due	<b>Two weeks after admissions email is received</b>
Classes start	<b>July 2022</b>

## **Admission Decisions**

The admissions committee will recommend one of the following decisions based upon the collective judgment of the committee and a point scoring system:



- a. **Full Admission:** Offered to candidates with all prerequisites complete along with a conferred bachelor's degree. Those with outstanding requirements will be recommended for provisional admission status. The program requires a non-refundable \$500 advanced tuition deposit to secure seat placement, which is applied toward the first semester's tuition payment.
- b. **Provisional Admission:** Candidates with a bachelor's degree and/or prerequisite courses "in progress" may be admitted as long as these requirements are fulfilled and official documentation received no later than by May 31, 2022 or the candidate's admission offer will be withdrawn.
- c. **Wait-list:** Applicants selected as wait-list candidates will be notified of their admission status by mid-June. Those not admitted from the list must reapply if they wish to be considered in a subsequent cycle. Rank or position on the list will not be disclosed to candidates due to its dynamic nature. (See FAQs.)
- c. **Denial:** Applicants not selected for admission status will be notified in writing.

## **Advanced Placement/Transfer and Credit for Experiential Learning**

The Division of PA Studies will consider requests for up to 15 (or equivalent) semester hours of transfer credit into the curriculum. These courses must have been successfully completed within the past three years with a minimum grade of "B" or better in a graduate-level program at a regionally-accredited institution of higher learning. Courses must be directly applicable to the established PA program curriculum, as determined by the faculty after thorough review of all appropriate documents (application, transcripts, recommendations and personal request letter). Competency on the subject material will be assessed in accordance with the course requirements prior to acceptance of transfer credit.

If the request for transfer of credits is from another PA educational program, it must be from another graduate-level accredited 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 apply to Shenandoah University through CASPA.

## **Technical Standards**

Technical standards for admission establish the expectations and abilities considered essential for students admitted to the program in order to achieve the level of competency required for graduation and clinical practice. Candidates should review these Standards before initiating an application. A list of our Technical Standards is found on the [PA Program Application](#) web page.

## **Deferment Policy**

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

## **Other Requirements**

Applicants admitted to the program must provide evidence of good health and up-to-date immunizations prior to matriculation. Prior to beginning coursework, students are required to authorize and submit to a criminal

background check, including sex offenses and crimes against minors. A history of a conviction at the felony level may prevent the student from placement for clinical training and thereby ability to satisfy graduation requirements. Students must also submit to drug testing required by clinical practice sites or the program. Non-compliance with the criminal background checks and/or drug testing policies may be cause for dismissal from the program. In addition, students are required to maintain health insurance and liability insurance coverage. Further information will be reviewed in detail at orientation. **Admitted students are required to attend all orientation sessions scheduled by the program.**

Falsification of any portion of the application process, including the CASPA application, will be cause for immediate withdrawal of the admission offer or dismissal from the PA Program.

## **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, 2021, the aggregate five-year first-time taker pass rate of Shenandoah University Physician Assistant program graduates (Classes 2016 – 2020) is 95 percent while the national pass rate for the past five years is 96 percent. Additional information regarding SUPA Program's graduate performance on the national certification (PANCE) examination is found on our [Accreditation & Outcomes](#) website page.

### **Cost & Financial Aid**

Tuition and fees are set annually. For the 2021-22 academic year it is estimated that tuition, fees, and other program-related expenses for the entire program will total around \$92,590. This amount includes books (including e-texts), medical equipment, software, and supplies. Additional details are provided on the program website. 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.

Note: The Shenandoah University Board of Trustees reviews and approves the university budget on an annual basis. As part of that process, tuition increases are considered and may be implemented.

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:

## **Contact Information**

Office of Financial Aid

(540) 665-4538

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

[www.su.edu/financial-aid/](http://www.su.edu/financial-aid/)

Office of Admissions

(540) 665-4581

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

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

Physician Assistant Program

(540) 545-7381

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

<http://www.su.edu/physician-assistant/>

Through the generosity of alumni, community friends and foundations, the SUPA program is able to provide several scholarships each year. Additional information regarding SU as well as private and professional association scholarships will be provided in fall of entering year. 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://www.nhsc.hrsa.gov/scholarships/>

## **Non-Discrimination Policy**

Shenandoah University values the unique and diverse perspectives of individuals and communities locally and globally and seeks to foster mutual understanding in an inviting community where individuals are welcome and respected. The university does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, genetic information, veteran's status or on any other basis protected under applicable law.

### **Course Sequence for Academic Years 2021-2023 for Class of 2023**

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>Course Number</b>
<b>Summer 1</b>	Medical Physiology & Genetics	3	PA-504
	Introduction to the Physician Assistant Profession	1	PA-511
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Fall 1</b>	Anatomy for Physician Assistants I	4	PA-508
	Medical Interview & Physical Assessment I	2	PA-515
	Medical Interview & Physical Assessment Lab I	1	PAL-515
	Clinical Medicine I	4	PA-525
	Diagnostic Tests & Procedures I	1	PA-530
	Pharmacotherapeutics I	1.5	PA-535
	Clinical Integration Seminar I	1.5	PA-635
	Professional Seminar I	0.5	PA-645
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>15.5</b>	
	<b>Spring 1</b>	Anatomy for Physician Assistants II	4
Medical Interview & Physical Assessment II		2	PA -517
Medical Interview & Physical Assessment Lab II		1	PAL-517
Clinical Medicine II		4	PA-526
Diagnostic Tests & Procedures II		1	PA-531
Diagnostics Lab		0.5	PAL-531
Pharmacotherapeutics II		2.5	PA-536
Clinical Integration Seminar II		2.5	PA-636
Professional Seminar II		0.5	PA-646
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>18</b>	
<b>Summer 2</b>	Neuroscience	1	PA-507
	Healthcare Systems and Issues in Healthcare	1	PA-513
	PA Clinical Skills	1	PA-519
	PA Clinical Skills Lab	1	PAL-519
	Primary Care Clinical Practicum I	2	PA-579
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>6</b>	
<b>Fall 2</b>	Clinical Medicine III	4	PA-527
	Diagnostic Tests & Procedures III	1	PA-532
	Pharmacotherapeutics III	2.5	PA-537
	Humanities for the PA Profession	2	PA-611

	Epidemiology, Research & Interpreting Medical Literature	3	PA-614
	CI Case Seminar III	1.5	PA-637
	Professional Seminar III	0.5	PA-647
	Women's Health	2	PA-671
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>16.5</b>	
<b>Spring 2</b>	Clinical Rotations *	10	
	Rotation Seminar I	1	PA-600
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>11</b>	
<b>Summer 3</b>	Clinical Rotations *	5	
	Rotation Seminar II	0.5	PA-601
	Health Promotion, Disease Prev.& Community Resources	2	PA-612
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>7.5</b>	
<b>Fall 3</b>	Clinical Rotation *	2.5	
	Capstone Seminar	1	PA-603
	Community Preceptorship Clinical Practicum	4	PA-690
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>7.5</b>	
	<b>Total Non-Elective Credits</b>	<b>86</b>	
	<b>Grand Total (includes three credit elective course)**</b>	<b>89</b>	

\*Sequence of clinical practica will vary by student.

\*\*Additional requirement. Each student is required to take at least one 3 credit professional elective course that is interdisciplinary in nature. Scheduling will be determined by the student based on course availability and in consultation with his/her advisor. Generally graduate courses with the HP prefix will be approved. However, students may select other graduate courses to fulfill the elective with the approval of their advisor.

<b><u>Breakdown of Clinical Courses</u></b>	<b><u>Credits</u></b>	<b><u>Weeks</u></b>
Primary Care Clinical Practicum I (PA-579)	2.0	4
Primary Care Clinical Practicum II (PA-680)	2.5	5
Primary Care Clinical Practicum III (PA-681)	2.5	5
Primary Care Clinical Practicum IV (PA-682)	2.5	5
Emergency Medicine Clinical Practicum (PA-683)	2.5	5
Surgical Clinical Practicum (PA-685)	2.5	5
Inpatient Care Clinical Practicum (PA-687)	2.5	5
Elective Clinical Practicum (PA-689)	2.5	5
Community Preceptorship Clinical Practicum (PA-690)	4.0	8
<b>Total Clinical Weeks</b>		<b>47</b>