

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 5th cohort of students that matriculated at the Atlanta campus is the class of 2025.

Goals

The South College Physician Assistant (PA) program has 6 primary goals, designed to achieve our mission and vision of educating the next generation of highly qualified physician assistants.

- The program seeks to enroll highly qualified and diverse applicants at or above program matriculant UG GPA and SCI GPA.**

Average Student Preparedness for the South College Physician Assistant Program, Classes of 2023-2025.					
Student Preparedness	Class of 2023 K & A	Class of 2024 K & A	Class of 2025 Knoxville	Class of 2025 Atlanta	National average*
Undergraduate GPA	3.59	3.60	3.71	3.64	3.64
Undergraduate SCI GPA	3.49	3.53	3.64	3.56	3.52
GRE scores (V/Q/A)	153/152/4.2	152/151/4.2	153/153/4.1	151/151/4.1	153/152/4.1
Patient Care Experience (hours)	1,533	2346	1,501	2,127	3,240
PA Program Graduation %	92%	93%	TBD	TBD	93.3%
Caucasian^	74%	77%	84%	70%	81.5%

*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 2025 will graduate in December 2025.

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

^Click for the [expanded Knoxville student demographics](#)

^Click for the [expanded Atlanta student demographics](#)

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. Each campus is at or below the national average for Caucasians matriculating, which shows higher diversity among students.

- Provide students with a rigorous didactic curriculum that 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 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 them in prominent peer-reviewed journals. ([see Student Publications](#))

At the culmination of the didactic phase (Quarter 5), 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.

[View the detailed Didactic Curriculum](#)

Didactic Phase Outcomes			
	(K) Knoxville; (A) Atlanta		
Items or Outcomes	Class of 2023	Class of 2024	Class of 2025
Number entering didactic phase/matriculated	85	85	85
Didactic PACKRAT – taken at the beginning of Quarter 5 (N Av = National Average)	N Av 135 K 144 A 141	N Av 134 K 143 A 147	N Av 132 K 144 A 134
Number who started Qtr. 5 and passed Didactic Summative Evaluation with $\geq 80\%$.	K 100% A 100%	K 100% A 100%	K 100% A 100%
Average Cumulative Didactic GPA	K 3.60 A 3.61	K 3.61 A 3.71	K 3.70 A 3.64
Number entering the clinical phase	K 77 A 79	K 79 A 79	K 84 A 80
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 4.69 A 4.76	K 4.65 A 4.58	K 4.76 A 4.65

The South College benchmarks for students are: 1. score as a cohort above the national average for PACKRAT, 2. 95% of students who start Q5 will pass DSE, 3. the cumulative GPA to be ≥ 3.0 for end of didactic phase, and 4. rotation 1 to be ≥ 3.0 for preparedness.

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 and skills taught in the didactic phase. This is supported by the benchmarks being met, noting the cohort PACKRAT average is well above the national average, high didactic cumulative GPA, and rotation 1 preceptor ratings above 4.5.

3. **Provide students with a comprehensive clinical curriculum that prepares them to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam, having the program pass rate at or above the national average.**

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.

[View the detailed Clinical Curriculum](#)

Preceptor Feedback, Student Assessment for Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences, Classes of 2022-2024*.				
Area Assessed	Class of 2022 K & A Combined	Class of 2023 K & A Combined	Class of 2024	
			Knox	ATL
Medical Interview	4.85	4.86	4.88	4.86
Physical Examination	4.83	4.83	4.83	4.82
Oral Case Presentation	4.84	4.85	4.85	4.81
Written Patient Record	4.85	4.87	4.87	4.81
Knowledge of Diagnostic Studies	4.78	4.81	4.84	4.78
Ability to Perform Clinical Procedures	4.88	4.87	4.86	4.82
Problem-solving/Critical Thinking	4.83	4.84	4.86	4.79
Factual Knowledge & Concepts	4.83	4.83	4.86	4.80
Assessment/Differential Diagnosis	4.81	4.82	4.85	4.80
Ability to Form Management Plan	4.81	4.82	4.86	4.78
Ability to Implement Management Plan	4.82	4.84	4.86	4.80
Relating to Colleagues	4.92	4.93	4.95	4.92
Relating to Patients	4.93	4.93	4.95	4.91
Understanding Role of PA	4.91	4.94	4.96	4.93
Self-confidence	4.85	4.87	4.87	4.84
Reliability and Dependability	4.92	4.94	4.95	4.93
Professionalism	4.89	4.91	4.92	4.90
Internal Medicine Rotation	4.85	4.81	4.87	4.79
General Surgery Rotation	4.72	4.77	4.80	4.73
Family Medicine Rotation	4.91	4.93	4.91	4.83
Emergency Medicine Rotation	4.88	4.89	4.83	4.85
Women's Health Rotation	4.94	4.91	4.94	4.89
Pediatric Rotation	4.81	4.85	4.88	4.92
Behavioral Health Rotation	4.91	4.92	4.96	4.89
Elective Rotation	4.87	4.88	4.88	4.85

*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 ≥ 4.0 in all areas.

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 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 2020-2024.					
(K) Knoxville, (A) Atlanta					
Areas Assessed	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
South College first-time takers pass rate	94%	K 90% A 95%	K 96% A 97%	K 92% A 94%	K 94% A 96%
National first-time takers pass rate	93%	92%	92%	92%	92%^
South College all takers pass rate	100%	99%	96% ^a	98%*	TBD*
National all-takers pass rate	96%	95%	95%	95%^	95%^
Number of SC students tested	83	K 82 A 39	K 79 A 59	K 77 A 79	K 79 A 79
Number of National students tested	9,990	11,063	11,260	11,856	12,424
Of those who passed PANCE - Employment rate of South College graduates as a PA*	100%	100%	99%	99%	TBD

^ The official national average cannot be provided until the entire 2025 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 2024 is compared to the national pass rate published for the calendar year 2025.

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 2024.

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 1-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 PANCE, showing that we are at or above the national average the last 3 years.

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 lifelong learning skills and professional development.

Student Community Service Hours, Classes of 2020-2024.					
Community Service Hours	Class of 2020	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Class of 2023	Class of 2024
Average	55.8	53.46	56.0	58.8	58
Minimum	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0	50
Maximum	161.0	72.37	140.75	250.5	244
Total Hours Served	4,693	6,488	7,761	9,176	9,074
Due to your service as a PA student, will you volunteer in your community as a PA?*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	K - Yes – 67% A – Yes – 71%

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

**Starting with the co 2024, we added a question to their exit survey on their intent to serve their community as a PA due to the service they acquired during the program.*

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 2020-2024.					
Professional Organization	Class of 2020	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Class of 2023	Class of 2024
Tennessee Academy of Physician Assistants (TAPA)	100%	100% (K)	100% (K)	100% (K)	100% (K)
Georgia Academy of Physician Assistants (GAPA)	n/a	100% (A)	100% (A)	100% (A)	100% (A)
American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)	100%	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 and inspire 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.

- During this majority of the year (9 months), **Knoxville SFR** is 10.6 (170/16.0). In the Fall Quarter (3 months), the PA program is at maximum capacity when there are 3 concurrent cohorts. During this Fall Quarter, Knoxville SFR is 15.9 (255/16.0).
- During this majority of the year (9 months), **Atlanta SFR** is 10.3 (170/16.5). In the Fall Quarter (3 months), the PA program is at maximum capacity when there are 3 concurrent cohorts. During this Fall Quarter, Knoxville SFR is 15.5 (255/16.5).

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, clinical pharmacology, family medicine, women's health, internal medicine, emergency medicine, military medicine, geriatrics, dermatology, endocrinology, behavioral medicine, general surgery, orthopedics, anatomy, public health, 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. Most of the staff are assigned to the PA program on a full-time basis, with one clinical administrative position being part-time.

Supervised clinical practice experiences (rotations) occur with physicians who are specialty board-certified in their area of instruction, PAs, NPs or other licensed professionals. The PA program has active clinical sites across many states, with >1,400 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.