

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES PROGRAM

Physician assistants (PAs) are licensed clinicians who practice medicine in every specialty and setting. Trusted, rigorously educated, and trained healthcare professionals, PAs are dedicated to expanding access to care and transforming health and wellness through patient-centered, team-based medical practice. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs gather patient histories, conduct physical exams, order and interpret tests, diagnose and treat illnesses, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and write prescriptions. PA practice may also include education, research, and administrative services. PAs are trained using the medical model similar to that of their physician colleagues. This broad training allows them the lateral flexibility to change specialties without requiring further education. Physician assistants are life-long learners who are required to attain continuing medical education in order to incorporate the latest medical advances into their practices.

Des Moines University believes there is a need for advanced practice providers on the primary health care team. The utilization of physician assistants over the last 60 years has demonstrated that PAs provide high-quality and cost-effective medical care to patients. Through the availability of PAs, patient access to healthcare can be improved.

Mission

As the Physician Assistant program, our mission is:

To develop highly competent and compassionate physician assistants who are committed to patient-centered care.

Our Core Values Are:

- **Teamwork:** A collaborative, multidisciplinary approach is key to providing quality healthcare and is the cornerstone on which the PA profession was built.
- **Integrity:** Honesty, respect, and high ethical standards are important traits of a healthcare provider.
- **Professionalism:** Standards of professional conduct create role models for others, avoid conflicts of interest, promote cultural competence, and exhibit dedication to quality medical care.
- **Empathy:** Compassionate and understanding healthcare providers address the concerns of the whole person.

Program Competencies

1. Demonstrate knowledge of basic scientific principles as they relate to evidence-based clinical medicine. (Medical Knowledge)
2. Take a comprehensive patient history and perform an appropriate physical exam to obtain information needed to formulate an appropriate differential diagnosis for patients across the lifespan, in varying encounter types and settings. (History and Physical Examination)
3. Recognize the epidemiology, etiology, signs and symptoms, and appropriate diagnostic studies necessary to provide an accurate diagnosis for patients across the lifespan, in varying encounter types and settings. (Diagnosis)

4. Utilize preventive health measures and manage disease in patients across the lifespan, in varying encounter types and settings, using pharmaceutical therapeutics, clinical interventions, and patient education. (Patient Management)
5. Demonstrate effective communication skills when interacting with patients, families, and other members of the healthcare team. (Communication)
6. Demonstrate sensitivity to the patient's race, culture, age, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, gender, and physical and intellectual abilities. (Community and Culture)
7. Self-evaluate behaviors and medical knowledge to recognize personal limitations. (Professionalism)
8. Document adequate patient information regarding care provided, for medical, legal, quality assurance and financial purposes. (Healthcare Systems)
9. Analyze and utilize medical literature. (Evidence-based Practice)
10. Exhibit professionalism, respect, compassion, and integrity, with accountability to patients, society, and the profession. (Interprofessional Collaborative Practice)

Program Requirements

To be considered for admission into the Physician Assistant program, candidates must hold a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university within the United States. Applicants may submit Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores during the application process but are not required. A minimum cumulative GPA of 2.8 or higher is required to be considered for admission. All prerequisite courses must be taken at regionally accredited institutions. No grade lower than a "C" will be accepted for prerequisite coursework. CLEP credits, AP credits, and P/F credits will not be considered for prerequisites. Special consideration may be given to those who received P/F credit due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Subject	Required Course(s) or Term Hours
Biology ^{1,2}	16 semester hours
Chemistry ^{1,3}	15 semester hours
Psychology ⁴	6 semester hours
Statistics or Biostatistics	1 course
Medical Terminology	1 course

¹ It is highly recommended that chemistry and biology prerequisites be completed within five years of matriculation.

² A semester each of human anatomy, physiology, microbiology and genetics. Labs are required, when available, for all biology courses. Exercise science and PE courses do not count toward biology prerequisites.

³ A semester each of inorganic chemistry, organic chemistry and biochemistry. Labs are required, when available, for all chemistry courses.

⁴ Including one course of abnormal psychology.

Applicants must have completed at least 750 hours of direct patient care experience as an employee or volunteer in a medical office, hospital, or extended-care facility. Shadowing a physician assistant is required. Completion of PA shadowing hours prior to application is typically expected for favorable consideration. Volunteer and paid experiences

may be combined, but all acceptable clinical experiences must involve hands-on care of patients. Patient care experiences obtained through the military (combat medic, field medical tech, etc.) are especially competitive. Application to the PA program prior to completing the patient care experience hours is allowed; however, a plan for completion of the hours should be included within the application.

Additional information can be found on the [PA program webpage](#).

Program Application Process

Des Moines University participates in the web-based Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) offered through the PA Education Association (PAEA) and rolling admissions.

Detailed information regarding the process can be found on the [PA program webpage](#).

Select candidates will be invited to interview. Applicants will receive a response to their application after the interview process.

The Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program does not accept transfer credits or experiential learning credits. CLEP credit, AP credit, and Pass/Fail credit cannot be counted toward prerequisite coursework either. Transfer credits, advanced standing, or advanced placement are not accepted regardless of previous graduate work in health care. All incoming students must complete the entire PA curriculum.

Curriculum Overview and Outline

The Physician Assistant program is 26 months in length and offers 112 academic credits. The first 14 months are devoted to didactic instruction. The following 12 months are devoted to clinical instruction. The academic calendar includes breaks between each term.

Didactic Curriculum

The didactic curriculum in the Physician Assistant program is designed to meet the needs of students who will be working in primary care and medical specialties. The curriculum is enhanced by coursework in medical ethics, healthcare delivery, health policy, public health, research methods, diversity and inclusion, and PA professional topics. Didactic courses are primarily in person with occasional online or hybrid sessions.

Clinical Curriculum

The clinical curriculum allows students the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained in the didactic phase to the clinical setting through various learning modalities, including Supervised Clinical Practice Experiences (SCPE). Clinical courses focus on the following areas: Family Medicine (8 weeks), Internal Medicine (8 weeks), Primary Care (4 weeks), Emergency Medicine (4 weeks), Surgery (4 weeks), Behavioral and Mental Health (4 weeks), Women's Health (2 weeks), and Pediatrics (2 weeks). Students are also required to complete eight weeks of selective clinical coursework. Sites are located throughout Iowa, the Midwest, and the United States. Students may be able to complete an international experience through the [global health department](#) as part of the selective coursework. Clinical courses are conducted primarily in person, with possible telemedicine experiences in which preceptors are present in the room, except for the behavioral and mental health rotation, which may be primarily via telemedicine.

Students are not required to solicit clinical sites or preceptors. The program allows students to suggest clinical sites and/or preceptors.

The program will then comprehensively evaluate suggested sites and/or preceptors and approve based on educational suitability.

Program Outcomes

To review the program's goals and outcomes, please visit the program's [webpage](#).

National Certification

Students who satisfactorily complete the requirements for graduation from the Physician Assistant program are eligible to take the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). Those earning a passing score on this examination are granted certification, which is one of the requirements to practice as a physician assistant in the United States. Certification is indicated by the designation "PA-C" behind a physician assistant's name.

TECHNICAL STANDARDS FOR ADMISSION, ACADEMIC PROMOTION AND GRADUATION

The purpose of this document is to specify the technical standards the University deems essential for a student to matriculate, remain in good standing and ultimately achieve all the competencies necessary for graduation within their program. The University, therefore, requires candidates to confirm their ability to comply with these standards, with or without reasonable accommodation, as a condition of admission and on an annual basis thereafter within a program's advising processes.

Fulfillment of the technical standards for graduation does not guarantee that a graduate will be able to fulfill the technical requirements of any specific post-graduate residency or fellowship program or employment setting.

A candidate who is seeking a DO, DPM, MSPAS, DPT or OTD degree at Des Moines University must be capable of completing core educational requirements and achieving the competencies in the basic and clinical sciences. DMU seeks to develop candidates who have a deep and robust health science or medical knowledge base and outstanding clinical skills, with the ability to appropriately apply them, effectively interpret information, and contribute to decisions across a broad spectrum of medical situations and settings. The critical skills required to be successful are outlined below and include the ability to observe, communicate, perform motor functions, as well as to understand, integrate core knowledge and skills, and to behave appropriately in varied educational and professional situations.

Reasonable accommodations consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act and the Iowa Civil Rights Act may be required by otherwise qualified individual candidates to meet the technical standards specified below. Requests for University-provided accommodations will be granted if the requests are reasonable, do not cause a fundamental alteration of the health science or medical education program, do not cause an undue hardship, are consistent with the standards of the health science or medical profession, and are recommended by the Accommodations and Educational Support Specialist.

1. Observation: Candidates and students must be able to acquire required information and timely interpret demonstrations, experiments, and laboratory exercises in the basic sciences. They must be able to observe

a patient/client accurately for purposes of interactions, evaluation, and treatment.

2. **Communication:** Candidates and students must be able to demonstrate proficiency in the English language such that they can communicate effectively in oral and written form with all members of the health care team. Candidates and students must be able to communicate with patients/clients in order to elicit and share information. They must have the capacity for comfortable verbal and non-verbal communication and interpersonal skills to enable effective caregiving of patients/clients and collaboration within a multidisciplinary team. In any case where a candidate's ability to communicate is compromised, the candidate must demonstrate reasonable alternative means and/or abilities to communicate with patients/clients and members of the healthcare team.

3. **Motor and Sensory:** Candidates and students must have sufficient motor and tactile function to execute movements reasonably required to perform basic laboratory tests, perform physical examinations, and provide clinical care, including emergency treatment to patients. Such actions may require coordination of both gross and fine muscular movements and strength, vestibular function, and functional use of the senses of touch to meet professional care standards. In any case where a candidate's ability to complete and interpret physical findings using such skills and functions is compromised, the candidate must demonstrate reasonable alternative means and/or abilities to retrieve these physical findings. Candidates and students must be willing and able to touch and examine **without regard to known or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, creed, religion, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, or other characteristics protected by law.**

4. **Strength and Mobility:** Candidates and students must demonstrate strength, including upper and lower extremity and body strength, and mobility to provide clinical care, attend to emergency codes, and to perform or direct such maneuvers as CPR.

5. **Evaluation and Treatment Integration:** Consistent with the ability to assess at a minimum symmetry, range of motion, and tissue textures, candidates and students must perform proper evaluation and treatment integration.

6. **Intellectual, Conceptual, Integrative, and Quantitative Abilities:** Candidates and students must have the ability to accurately measure, calculate, reason, analyze, synthesize, problem solve, and think critically. They must also have the ability to participate and learn through a variety of modalities including, but not limited to, classroom instruction, small groups, virtual learning, team and collaborative activities. Interpretation of information from multiple sources (written, verbal, environmental, and interpersonal) is also expected. In addition, candidates and students should be able to comprehend three-dimensional relationships and understand the spatial relationships of structures. Candidates and students must be able to concentrate, timely analyze and interpret data, and make decisions within areas in which there is a reasonable amount of visual and auditory distraction.

7. **Behavioral Attributes, Social Skills, and Professional Expectation:** Candidates and students must be able to effectively utilize their intellectual abilities, exercise good judgment, complete all responsibilities attendant to the evaluation and care of patients/clients, and develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients and colleagues. Candidates and students must be able to professionally manage heavy workloads, prioritize conflicting demands, and function effectively under stress. They must be able to adapt to changing

environments; to display flexibility, to learn to function in the face of their own possible biases and uncertainties inherent in the clinical problems of patients, and to not engage in substance overuse or abuse. Candidates and students must be able to understand and determine the impact of the social determinants of health and other systemic issues (including workload and environmental demands) which impact the care for all individuals in a respectful and effective manner regardless of known or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, creed, religion, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, veteran status or any protected status. Professionalism, compassion, integrity, concern for others, ethical standards, interpersonal skills, engagement, emotional intelligence, and motivation are all qualities that are required throughout the educational process.

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Des Moines University welcomes qualified candidates and students with disabilities who meet the technical standards of the program, with or without reasonable accommodations. Students with a disability who may need accommodations during their educational career at DMU will be asked to reaffirm their need for accommodations when acknowledging the ability to meet technical standards annually. The student is responsible for requesting accommodations through the Accommodations and Educational Support Specialist in Academic Support within the Center for Educational Enhancement. Please reach out in person, by email (accommodations@dmu.edu), or by calling Academic Support at 515-271-1516. The Accommodations and Educational Support Specialist reviews all requests for accommodations through an individualized, interactive process.

The use of an intermediary may be a reasonable accommodation while performing some non-essential physical maneuvers or non-technical data gathering. However, an intermediary cannot substitute for the candidates' or student's interpretation and judgement. Intermediaries may not perform essential skills on behalf of the candidate or student, nor can they replace technical skills related to selection and observation.

PROCESS FOR ASSESSING COMPLIANCE WITH THE TECHNICAL STANDARDS

Candidates are required to attest at the time they accept an offer to matriculate that they meet the applicable technical standards, with or without reasonable accommodation, and annually confirm they continue to meet these standards. These standards are not intended to deter any candidate or student who might be able to complete the requirements of the curriculum with reasonable accommodations.

The University will provide reasonable accommodations as may be required by the Americans with Disabilities Act or the Iowa Civil Rights Act

A student whose behavior or performance raises questions concerning his or her ability to fulfill these technical standards may be required to obtain evaluation or testing by a health care provider designated by the University, and to provide the results to the Center for Educational Enhancement to be considered as part of the interactive process to determine possible reasonable accommodations.

Technological compensation can be made with respect to certain technical standards, but candidates and students should be able to perform these standards in a reasonably independent manner.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

In addition to the technical standards set forth, candidates and students must possess the general physical health necessary for performing the duties of a student in the health sciences and a health professional in training without endangering the lives of patients and/or colleagues with whom they might have contact.

Required COURSES

Code	Title	Credit Hours
Year I Summer Term		
MSPA 1330	Foundations in Medical Science	1
MSPA 1359	Physiology / Pathophysiology	6
MSPA 1360	Clinically Oriented Anatomy	5.5
MSPA 1376A	Clinical Skills A	2
Year I Fall Term		
MSPA 1331	Wellness	2.5
MSPA 1332	Pharmacology/Therapeutics I	3
MSPA 1337	Clinical Medicine I	8
MSPA 1365	Evidence Based Practice	1
MSPA 1376B	Clinical Skills B	2
MSPA 1384	Physical Diagnosis	2.5
MSPA 1385	Clinical Applications I	1
MSPA 1388A	PA Professional Practice A	1.5
Year I Spring Term		
MSPA 1333	Pharmacology/Therapeutics II	3.5
MSPA 1338	Clinical Medicine II	8
MSPA 1376C	Clinical Skills C	2
MSPA 1386	Clinical Applications II	1
MSPA 1388B	PA Professional Practice B	3
Year II Summer Term		
MSPA 1339	Clinical Medicine III	4
MSPA 1367	Health System and Policy	2.5
MSPA 1376D	Clinical Skills D	1.5
MSPA 1387	Clinical Applications III	1
Year II Fall, Spring & Final Summer Terms		
MSPA 2302	Behavioral and Mental Health	4
MSPA 2303	Emergency Medicine	4
MSPA 2310	Global Health Selective *	2-4
MSPA 2311	Surgical Selective *	2-4
MSPA 2312	Primary Care Selective *	2-4
MSPA 2313	Specialty Medicine Selective *	2-4
MSPA 2333	Women's Health	2
MSPA 2334	Pediatrics	2
MSPA 2335	Surgery	4
MSPA 2336A	Internal Medicine A	4
MSPA 2336B	Internal Medicine B	4
MSPA 2337A	Family Medicine A	4
MSPA 2337B	Family Medicine B	4
MSPA 2338	Primary Care	4
MSPA 2350A	Foundations of Clinical Practice A	3
MSPA 2350B	Foundations of Clinical Practice B	1.5

MSPA 2350C Foundations of Clinical Practice C 1

*Students must complete 8.0 credits of Selective

Total Credits Required: 112.0

Elective Courses

A complete list of university electives may be found on the [Elective Courses](#) page. Before enrolling, students must understand and follow these program guidelines regarding electives:

- The student must notify their advisor of their intent prior to enrolling in an elective course.
- The student must be in good academic standing.
- Required courses must take priority over elective course sessions/coursework. Students will not be excused from required sessions to attend elective course sessions.

Graduation Requirements

To graduate, a student must:

- Satisfactorily complete all required courses, activities, and assessments.
- Maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher based on a 4.0 scale.
- Satisfactorily discharge all financial obligations to Des Moines University.
- Receive recommendation for graduation by the PA faculty, the Dean of the College of Health Sciences, and the Board of Trustees.

The university awards a Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (MSPAS) degree.