

IUPUI GAC Reviewer Form

Document: New Degree Proposal, Master of Physician Assistant Studies, IUPUI

Summary of proposal: This document outlines a proposed curriculum for a full-time professional MPAS degree, housed in SHRS at IUPUI. The program requires 7 consecutive, full-time semesters over 27 months to achieve eligibility for national certification as a Physician Assistant. Applicants must have prior experience in a health-related field (not specified). The program expects to share resources from the IUSM, IUSON, Liberal Arts and Purdue School of Science. It proposes to prepare graduates for careers in research, public health, health administration and management, and teaching, as well as clinical practice delivering direct care to patients.

1. Goals: The goal to prepare PA clinicians at the Master's level is consistent with many other PA programs in the country, including the local program at Butler University, one at St. Francis Fort Wayne, and a newly-proposed program at Indiana State University.. Since the practice climate in Indiana has recently opened up for PA practice, this goal should be achievable. I am not aware of a needs assessment conducted by SHRS to determine the number of potential PA students, but this discipline is definitely growing. I do not know of projections regarding the number of PAs who might be hired in Indiana in any one year.

2. Academic soundness:

- Pre-requisites are quite specific, including 16 hours of human anatomy, physiology, microbiology, bacteriology, or zoology, and 16 hours of chemistry/biochemistry. This specificity implies there is a "Pre-PA" curriculum available at IUPUI or other IU campuses. Many undergraduates with a liberal arts or general studies background would not qualify without extensive additional coursework. Currently, for example, our BSN-prepared nursing graduates would not have the pre-requisite courses to enter the PA program.
- The achievement of this MPAS in the short time span suggested for students (12 months didactic, 15 months clinical experience) is in serious question, in my opinion. This is a Master's level program, but it requires 106 post-baccalaureate credits. This is 16 graduate credits more than a post-baccalaureate PhD. Students are projected to take 15-18 credits per semester. This is twice the customary full-time graduate student load at IUPUI. Some of these students may be expecting to work during their program, at least part time, so that credit load may be unachievable for some..
- The proposed curriculum includes a 1 credit course in Leadership, 4 credits in Evidence-based clinical inquiry, 2 credits in public health, 1 credit in health promotion, and 2 credits in legal/ethical issues. There is no preparation for

teaching. It is not apparent from the proposal if any courses are distance-accessible.

- The program proposes 27 new courses; of these, 9 are clinical rotations which still will show up as new courses. The timeline of approval of this number of new courses may be much slower than projected if the courses are sent through the customary iUPUI/IUB Graduate Curriculum course approval process.
- There is no suggested ratio for clinical hours: clock hours. In other clinical disciplines, specifying this ratio is crucial in managing student time in clinical placements.
- Student enrollment is limited to 50 per cohort (starting with 35 in the first year, and increasing yearly). This projection means there could be as many as 150 students enrolled at any one time. This is a very large number of students, especially considering the limitations on available clinical sites and preceptors. Advising 150 students will be a challenge for the one clinical coordinator projected. There would be heavy dependence on adjunct, part-time and volunteer teachers. There is one associate professor and two assistant professors listed as resources; none of these is a Physician Assistant.

3. Faculty resources: 10 faculty members will be required by year 3. It is not clear from the proposal how many doctorally-prepared Physician Assistants might be hired as tenure-track faculty. Most faculty members would be recruited from other disciplines, including medicine, basic science, nutrition and dietetics, and others. Some faculty members currently teaching in SHRS would be shared with this new program, but it is not clear from the proposal if students would be taking courses together with students from other programs in SHRS. As is the case in many clinical disciplines, hiring full-time faculty with appropriate credentials is difficult, since these practitioners command much higher salaries in the clinical world.

4. Overlap with other units: There is no other unit preparing clinicians as Physician Assistants. The PA practice overlaps considerably with Nurse Practitioners, who currently are prepared at the Master's level (and soon also will be prepared in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program at IUSON). The overlap and competition for clinical sites and preceptors will have enormous impact on the NP and DNP programs at the IUSON. There is no formal agreement from the School of Nursing regarding collaboration or cooperation on clinical sites, simulation center space, clinical preceptors, or availability of cross-listed courses. Currently, nursing courses in pharmacology, Pathophysiology, and Physical Health Assessment are at capacity, with increasing demand from nurses around the state.

5. Recommendations, comments, and my concerns:

I think that a PA program is appropriate for IUPUI. I applaud the SHRS for conceiving this ambitious plan, and I am confident that they will be successful in recruiting students who will graduate as competent clinicians.

However, I recommend that the projected size of the program be re-evaluated, in light of campus space resources, simulation center capacity, clinical site and preceptor availability, and faculty requirements. I suggest the faculty re-examine the number of courses that are listed as pre-requisites. I further suggest that the faculty re-evaluate the credit-hour requirement and consider the possibility of part-time study.