

DATE: January 31, 2013

SUBJECT: New Academic Program
University of Tennessee Health Science Center
Master of Medical Science – Physician Assistant (MMS-PA)

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Approval

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The proposed Master of Medical Science program in Physician Assistant (MMS-PA) is a clinical program focused on training physician assistants working under the supervision of licensed physicians. The proposed program will equip students with a significant amount of clinical experience, integrate the academic outcomes espoused by the accrediting body, and also provide a foundation of research and scholarly practices for students to build on throughout their careers as Physician Assistants. This degree program will be the first public option for physician assistant education in Tennessee.

PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION DATE: January 2014

1.1.20A MISSION: The proposed program supports the University of Tennessee Health Science Center’s mission of “bringing the benefits of the health sciences to the achievement and maintenance of human health, with a focus on citizens of Tennessee and the region.” Additionally, the program is in full compliance with the UTHSC 2009 Strategic Plan, particularly the priority area of expanding programs with a focus on program demand and financial viability.

The MMS-PA is in alignment with the goals outlined in the THEC 2010-15 Public Agenda for Higher Education, specifically the focus on strengthening Tennessee’s Knowledge Economy and increasing the number of graduate degrees awarded to the state’s citizens, especially in the areas of high demand STEM fields.

1.1.20B CURRICULUM: The program curriculum is directly linked with the standards required by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant. The curriculum consists of 112 credit hours, with students completing the program in two years of study. The curriculum follows the medical model of education that includes a didactic phase (62 credit hours) with coursework focus on basic sciences, clinical medicine and professional practice issues and research. The clinical year consists of eleven 4-week rotations with preceptors in clinical training sites. The course work in the clinical phase totals 50 credit hours.

All Physician Assistant students are required to complete a capstone project to integrate aspects of the health profession into a master’s level project. Project themes may be philanthropic as well as research oriented.

1.1.20C ACADEMIC STANDARDS: Program admission requires a bachelor’s degree; a minimum 2.75 overall undergraduate GPA; minimum combined GRE score of 300; personal statement, strong foundation in basic science courses and 300 hours of direct patient care experience. Additionally, personal statement and letters of recommendations will assist the Admissions Committee to determine applicants who are invited to campus for interviews.

Students must meet progression and graduation standards as published annually in the UTHSC catalog.

Projected Program Enrollment and Productivity

All students in the program will attend full-time, completing the degree in two years. MMS-PA programs generally have a very low attrition rate; this proposal forecasts an attrition rate of less than eight percent.

Year	Enrollment	Graduates
2014	26	--
2015	54	24
2016	58	28
2017	58	28
2018	58	28

1.1.20D FACULTY: The MMS-PA program will result in creation of a full time program director position, responsible for the administration of the program, hiring of additional faculty, and progress towards accreditation. At full implementation, the Physician Assistant program will employ six full-time faculty members. In addition to faculty, there will be a part-time Medical Director. Additionally, students in the program will benefit from clinical faculty from various departments that will teach in the didactic curriculum.

1.1.20E LIBRARY RESOURCES: The Health Sciences Library supports the instructional, research, and clinical care programs at UTHSC. Students will have access to a broad array of library resources, including online databases such as the National Library of Medicine.

1.1.20F ADMINISTRATION/ORGANIZATION: This program will result in creation of a new department within the already existing College of Allied Health Sciences. The Department of Physician Assistant Studies will be led by a Chair/Program Director that reports directly to the Dean.

1.1.20G SUPPORT RESOURCES: Students will have access to a wide range of support resources, including advising support from the Program Director, clinical assistance from fieldwork facilities, and research skills assistance from library personnel. The department will also hire an Administrative Assistant for Clinical Rotation Credentialing to assist students with their clinical rotations. UTHSC also has established numerous clinical affiliation agreements and the MMS-PA students will be added to these agreements for their clinical rotations.

1.1.20H FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT: Additional space will be required for implantation of this program, and the costs for renovation and furnishings are included in the program budget. The space is contiguous to the main campus and is located at 66 N. Pauline Street. The program will also utilize existing facilities at UTHSC. These facilities include areas within the College of Medicine Kaplan Clinical Skills Center, campus-wide simulation center and other clinical spaces.

1.1.20I NEED AND DEMAND: The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2018, close to 104,000 physician assistants will be needed. Nationally, there are more than 80,000 physician assistants eligible to practice in the United States. This deficit of qualified physician assistants is only expected to grow with the continued aging workforce population.

The *Allied Health in Tennessee 2010* report also projects the demand for additional physician assistants in Tennessee. The study found that the number of practicing physician assistants in Tennessee was estimated to be between 950 and 1000. Per capita, there were 156 physician assistants per million in population for Tennessee compared to the national average of 256 physician assistants.

1.1.20J NO UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION: The proposed program will be the only Physician Assistant program in operation at a public institution in Tennessee. Currently, there are five private institutions with a Master of Science, Physician Assistant program in Tennessee (Bethel University, Christian Brothers University, Lincoln Memorial University, South College, and Trevecca Nazarene University). Of the five programs, no program is located at an academic health center.

1.1.20K COOPERATING INSTITUTIONS: Clinical resource partnerships exist with numerous healthcare organizations for MMS-PA students to complete their clinical rotations.

1.1.20L DIVERSITY AND ACCESS: Attracting a diverse group of students to this program is a stated goal of the proposal. Additionally, the program will benefit from ongoing diversity recruitment initiatives that are in place at the College of Allied Health Sciences.

1.1.20M ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION: This program is eligible for accreditation by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant. The accreditation process consists of two stages: provisional accreditation and continuing accreditation. Provisional accreditation is for a limited defined period (three years) that includes a site visit. UTHSC has already submitted a letter of request for entry into the provisional accreditation process. Full accreditation is expected by 2017.

Additionally, the MMS-PA program will continuously monitor program and student learning outcomes using multiple evaluation tools. Program faculty and staff will participate in bi-annual retreats to make on-going improvements in curriculum, programs and practices to ensure compliance with accreditation standards and UTHSC policies.

1.1.200 EXTERNAL JUDGEMENT: External review of the proposed program was carried out during an institution site visit on September 24, 2012. Dr. Paul Lombardo, Associate Professor, Stony Brook University Medical Center and Past President of the American Academy of Physician Assistants and Dr. James Cawley, Professor and Interim Chair, Department of Prevention and Community Medicine, The George Washington University, served as the external evaluators.

Dr. Lombardo and Dr. Cawley made a joint recommendation for the approval of the UTHSC MMS-PA program, stating: “In essence, all key elements of the proposal we reviewed give us great confidence that prospective applicants will have access to a high quality, cost effective PA educational opportunity and that the citizens of the State will benefit from increased access to quality health care that the program’s graduates will provide. For these reasons, among many others, we fully and enthusiastically recommend that the program’s application be approved.”

1.1.20P COST/BENEFIT: The proposed Master’s program will be funded through campus reallocations and additional tuition revenues generated by the program.

1.1.30 POST APPROVAL MONITORING: An annual performance review of the proposed program will be conducted for the first five years following program approval. The review will be based on benchmarks established in the approved proposal. At the end of this period, the campus, governing board, and Commission staff will perform a summative evaluation. The benchmarks include, but are not limited to, enrollment and graduation, program cost, progress toward accreditation and other metrics set by the institution and agreed upon by governing board and Commission staff. If benchmarks are not met during the monitoring period, the Commission may recommend that the governing board terminate the program. If additional time is needed and requested by the governing board, the Commission may choose to extend the monitoring period.