



Accreditation Review Commission on Education  
for the Physician Assistant, Inc.

**Comparison of ARC-PA Accreditation Standards for Physician Assistant Education, 4th Edition (2010), To the Competencies for the Physician Assistant Profession (2005)**

The Accreditation *Standards* for Physician Assistant Education are the requirements to which an accredited program is held accountable and provide the basis on which the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) will confer or deny program accreditation. “The *Standards* recognize the continuing evolution of the PA profession and practice and endorse experiential competency-based education as a fundamental tenet of PA education. While acknowledging the interests of the sponsoring institution as it works with the program to meet the *Standards*, the *Standards* reflect a determination that a commonality in the core professional curriculum of programs remains desirable and necessary to offer curricula of *sufficient* depth and breadth to prepare all PA graduates for practice. The *Standards* allow programs to remain creative and innovative in program design and the methods of curriculum delivery and evaluation used to enable students to achieve program *goals* and student *learning outcomes*. Mastery of *learning outcomes* is key to preparing students for entry into clinical practice.” 1

The purpose of the Competencies for the Physician Assistant Profession “is to communicate to the PA profession and the public a set of competencies that all physician assistants regardless of specialty or setting are expected to acquire and maintain throughout their careers. This document serves as a map for the individual PA, the physician-PA team and organizations that are committed to promoting the development and maintenance of these professional competencies among physician assistants.” 2

While the purposes of the two documents are different and do not have word for word correlation, they are complimentary.

(Note: Representatives of the American Academy of PAs, the ARC-PA, the National Commission on Certification for PAs and the Physician Assistant Education Association began reviewing the Competencies for the Physician Assistant Profession in August 2010. As that document is revised, this comparison document will be updated.)

Competencies	Standards
The clinical role of PAs includes primary and specialty care in medical and surgical practice settings. Professional competencies for physician assistants include the effective and appropriate application of medical	PAs are academically and clinically prepared to practice medicine with the direction and responsible supervision of a doctor of medicine or osteopathy. The physician-PA team relationship is fundamental to the PA

1 *Accreditation Standards for Physician Assistant Education*, third edition, Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc., 4<sup>th</sup> edition, March 2010

2 *Competencies for the Physician Assistant Profession*, National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, March, 2005.

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knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, patient care, professionalism, practice-based learning and improvement, systems-based practice, as well as an unwavering commitment to continual learning, professional growth and the physician-PA team, for the benefit of patients and the larger community being served. These competencies are demonstrated within the scope of practice, whether medical or surgical, for each individual physician assistant as that scope is defined by the supervising physician and appropriate to the practice setting.

**MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE:** Medical knowledge includes an understanding of pathophysiology, patient presentation, differential diagnosis, patient management, surgical principles, health promotion and disease prevention. Physician assistants must demonstrate core knowledge about established and evolving biomedical and clinical sciences and the application of this knowledge to patient care in their area of practice. In addition, physician assistants are expected to demonstrate an investigatory and analytic thinking approach to clinical situations. Physician assistants are expected to:

- understand etiologies, risk factors, underlying pathologic process, and epidemiology for medical conditions
- identify signs and symptoms of medical conditions
- select and interpret appropriate diagnostic or lab studies
- manage general medical and surgical conditions to include understanding the

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profession and enhances the delivery of high quality health care. Within the physician-PA relationship, PAs make clinical decisions and provide a broad range of diagnostic, therapeutic, preventive and health maintenance services. The clinical role of PAs includes primary and specialty care in medical and surgical practice settings. PA practice is focused on patient care and may include educational, research and administrative activities.

The role of the PA demands intelligence, sound judgment, intellectual honesty, appropriate interpersonal skills and the capacity to respond to emergencies in a calm and reasoned manner. Essential attributes of the graduate PA include an attitude of respect for self and others, adherence to the concepts of privilege and confidentiality in communicating with patients and a commitment to the patient's welfare.

B1.02 The curriculum *must* include core knowledge about established and evolving biomedical and clinical sciences and the application of this knowledge to patient care.

B1.03 The curriculum *must* be of *sufficient* breadth and depth to prepare the student for the clinical practice of medicine.

B1.07 The curriculum *must* include instruction related to the development of problem solving and medical decision-making skills.

B2.02 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in the following areas of applied medical sciences and their application in clinical practice:

- a) anatomy,
- b) physiology,
- c) pathophysiology, pharmacology and pharmacotherapeutics,
- d) the genetic and molecular

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<p>indications, contraindications, side effects, interactions and adverse reactions of pharmacologic agents and other relevant treatment modalities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify the appropriate site of care for presenting conditions, including identifying emergent cases and those requiring referral or admission</li> <li>• identify appropriate interventions for prevention of conditions</li> <li>• identify the appropriate methods to detect conditions in an asymptomatic individual</li> <li>• differentiate between the normal and the abnormal in anatomic, physiological, laboratory findings and other diagnostic data</li> <li>• appropriately use history and physical findings and diagnostic studies to formulate a differential diagnosis</li> <li>• provide appropriate care to patients with chronic conditions</li> </ul>	<p>mechanisms of health and disease</p> <p>B2.03 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in clinical medicine covering all organ systems.</p> <p>B2.05 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in patient evaluation, diagnosis and management.</p> <p>ANNOTATION: Instruction in patient assessment and management includes caring for patients of all ages from initial presentation through ongoing follow-up. It includes instruction in interviewing and eliciting a medical history; performing complete and focused physical examinations; generating differential diagnoses; and ordering and interpreting diagnostic studies. Patient management instruction addresses acute and longitudinal management. Instruction related to treatment plans is patient centered and inclusive, addressing medical issues, patient education and referral</p> <p>B2.06 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in the provision of clinical medical care across the life span.</p> <p>ANNOTATION: Preclinical instruction prepares PAs to provide preventive, emergent, acute, chronic, rehabilitative, palliative and end-of-life care. It includes content relevant to prenatal, infant, children, adolescent, adult and elderly populations.</p> <p>B3.03 <i>Supervised clinical practice</i> experiences <i>must</i> provide sufficient patient exposure to allow each student to meet program-defined requirements with patients seeking:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) medical care across the life span to include, infants, children, adolescents, adults, and the</li> </ol>

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elderly,

- b) women's health (to include prenatal and gynecologic care),
- c) care for conditions requiring surgical management, including pre-operative, intra-operative, post-operative care and
- d) care for behavioral and mental health conditions.

B3.04 *Supervised clinical practice experiences must occur in the following settings:*

- a) outpatient,
- b) emergency department,
- c) inpatient and
- d) operating room.

ANNOTATION: While patients often use emergency departments for primary care complaints, students are expected to interact with patients needing emergent care in this setting. Urgent care centers may be used for *supervised clinical practice experiences*, but do not replace the requirement to have students in emergency departments.

B3.07 *Supervised clinical practice experiences should occur with preceptors practicing in the following disciplines:*

- a) family medicine,
- b) internal medicine,
- c) general surgery,
- d) pediatrics,
- e) ob/gyn and
- f) behavioral and mental health care.

**INTERPERSONAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** Interpersonal and communication skills encompass verbal, nonverbal and written exchange of information.

Physician assistants must demonstrate

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interpersonal and communication skills that result in effective information exchange with patients, their patients' families, physicians, professional associates, and the health care system. Physician assistants are expected to

- create and sustain a therapeutic and ethically sound relationship with patients
- use effective listening, nonverbal, explanatory, questioning, and writing skills to elicit and provide information
- appropriately adapt communication style and messages to the context of the individual patient interaction
- work effectively with physicians and other health care professionals as a member or leader of a health care team or other professional group

- apply an understanding of human behavior
- demonstrate emotional resilience and stability, adaptability, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity and anxiety

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B2.04 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in interpersonal and communication skills that result in the effective exchange of information and collaboration with patients, their families and other health professionals.

Introduction to Section B: The program curriculum prepares students to provide patient centered care and collegially work in physician-PA teams in an interprofessional team environment.

B1.08 The curriculum *must* include instruction to prepare students to work collaboratively in interprofessional patient centered teams.

ANNOTATION: Such instruction includes content on the roles and responsibilities of various health care professionals, emphasizing the team approach to patient centered care beyond the traditional physician-PA team approach.

B2.08 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in the social and behavioral sciences as well as normal and abnormal development across the life span.

ANNOTATION: Social and behavioral sciences prepare students for primary care practice. Instruction includes detection and treatment of substance abuse; human sexuality; issues of death, dying and loss; response to illness, injury and stress; principles of violence identification and prevention; and psychiatric/behavioral conditions.

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**PATIENT CARE:** Patient care includes age-appropriate assessment, evaluation and management. Physician assistants must demonstrate care that is effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient and equitable for the treatment of health problems and the promotion of wellness. Physician assistants are expected to

- work effectively with physicians and other health care professionals to provide patient-centered care

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B1.03 The curriculum *must* be of *sufficient* breadth and depth to prepare the student for the clinical practice of medicine

B2.05 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in patient evaluation, diagnosis and management.

ANNOTATION: Instruction in patient assessment and management includes caring for patients of all ages from initial presentation through ongoing follow-up. It includes instruction in interviewing and eliciting a medical history; performing complete and focused physical examinations; generating differential diagnoses; and ordering and interpreting diagnostic studies. Patient management instruction addresses acute and longitudinal management. Instruction related to treatment plans is patient centered and inclusive, addressing medical issues, patient education and referral.

Introduction to Section B: The program curriculum prepares students to provide patient centered care and collegially work in physician-PA teams in an interprofessional team environment.

B1.08 The curriculum *must* include instruction to prepare students to work collaboratively in interprofessional patient centered teams.

ANNOTATION: Such instruction includes content on the roles and responsibilities of various health care professionals, emphasizing the team approach to patient centered care beyond the traditional physician-PA team approach.

B2.04 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in interpersonal and

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate caring and respectful behaviors when interacting with patients and their families</li>   <li>• gather essential and accurate information about their patients</li>   <li>• make informed decisions about diagnostic and therapeutic interventions based on patient information and preferences, up-to-date scientific evidence, and clinical judgment</li> </ul>	<p>communication skills that result in the effective exchange of information and collaboration with patients, their families and other health professionals.</p> <p>B2.04 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in interpersonal and communication skills that result in the effective exchange of information and collaboration with patients, their families and other health professionals.</p> <p>B2.05 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in patient evaluation, diagnosis and management.</p> <p>Introduction: Physician assistants are academically and clinically prepared to practice medicine with the direction and responsible supervision of a doctor of medicine or osteopathy. .... Within the physician-PA relationship, PAs make clinical decisions and provide a broad range of diagnostic, therapeutic, preventive and health maintenance services.</p> <p>B1.02 The curriculum <i>must</i> include core knowledge about established and evolving biomedical and clinical sciences and the application of this knowledge to patient care.</p> <p>B2.10 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction to prepare students to search, interpret and evaluate the medical literature, including its application to individualized patient care.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop and carry out patient management plans</li>   <li>• counsel and educate patients and their families</li> </ul>	<p>B2.05 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in patient evaluation, diagnosis and management.</p> <p>B2.09 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in basic counseling and patient education skills.</p>

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- competently perform medical and surgical procedures considered essential in the area of practice
- provide health care services and education aimed at preventing health problems or maintaining health

**PROFESSIONALISM:** Professionalism is the expression of positive values and ideals as care is delivered. Foremost, it involves prioritizing the interests of those being served above one's own. Physician assistants must know their professional and personal limitations. Professionalism also requires that PAs practice without impairment from substance abuse, cognitive deficiency or mental illness. Physician assistants must demonstrate a high level of responsibility, ethical practice, sensitivity to a diverse patient population and adherence to legal and regulatory requirements. Physician assistants are expected to demonstrate:

- understanding of legal and regulatory

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ANNOTATION: Instruction in counseling and patient education skills is patient centered, culturally sensitive and focused on helping patients cope with illness, injury and stress, adhere to prescribed treatment plans and modify their behaviors to more healthful patterns.

B2.07 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in technical skills and procedures based on current professional practice.

B3.02 *Supervised clinical practice experiences must* enable students to meet program expectations and acquire the *competencies* needed for clinical PA practice.

ANNOTATION: It is expected that the program expectations of students will address the types of patient encounters essential to preparing them for entry into practice. It is expected that at a minimum these will include preventive, emergent, acute, and chronic patient encounters.

B1.05 The curriculum *must* include instruction about intellectual honesty and appropriate academic and professional conduct.

B1.06 The curriculum *must* include instruction to prepare students to provide medical care to patients from diverse populations.

B2.14 The program curriculum *must* include

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<p>requirements, as well as the appropriate role of the physician assistant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional relationships with physician supervisors and other health care providers</li> <li>• respect, compassion, and integrity</li> </ul>	<p>instruction about PA licensure, credentialing and laws and regulations regarding professional practice.</p> <p>Introduction: The physician-PA team relationship is fundamental to the PA profession and enhances the delivery of high quality health care.</p> <p>B2.04 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in interpersonal and communication skills that result in the effective exchange of information and collaboration with patients, their families and other health professionals.</p> <p>B2.17 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in the PA profession, its historical development and current trends.</p> <p>ANNOTATION: Instruction related to PA professional issues addresses the physician-PA team relationship, political issues that affect PA practice, the PA professional organizations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responsiveness to the needs of patients and society</li> </ul>	<p>Introduction: The needs of patients and society <i>must</i> be considered by the ARC-PA, the sponsoring institutions and the programs.</p> <p>Section B Introduction: The program curriculum prepares students to provide patient centered care..... The curriculum .... emphasizes the importance of remaining current with the changing nature of clinical practice.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accountability to patients, society, and the profession</li> </ul>	<p>Introduction: The ARC-PA acknowledges ongoing changes in the delivery of health care and in the education of health professionals. The needs of patients and society <i>must</i> be considered by the ARC-PA, the sponsoring institutions and the programs.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commitment to excellence and on-going professional development</li> <li>• commitment to ethical principles pertaining to provision or withholding of clinical care, confidentiality of patient information, informed consent, and business practices</li> <li>• sensitivity and responsiveness to patients' culture, age, gender, and disabilities</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-reflection, critical curiosity and initiative</li> </ul>	<p>B2.16 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in the principles and practice of medical ethics.</p> <p>Introduction: The ARC-PA acknowledges ongoing changes in the delivery of health care and in the education of health professionals. The needs of patients and society <i>must</i> be considered by the ARC-PA, the sponsoring institutions and the programs.</p> <p>An environment that fosters and promotes <i>diversity</i> is considered essential to preparing PAs to provide service to others that is not exclusionary of any group, race, or culture. The various insights and resources offered by a diverse faculty, staff and student body increase the overall impact the PA profession can have on the future of the global community.</p>
<p><b>PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT:</b> Practice-based learning and improvement includes the processes through which clinicians engage in critical analysis of their own practice experience, medical literature and other information resources for the purpose of self-improvement. Physician assistants must be able to assess, evaluate and improve their patient care practices. Physician assistants are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyze practice experience and perform practice-based improvement activities using a systematic methodology in concert with other members of the health care delivery team</li> </ul>	

Competencies	Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>locate, appraise, and integrate evidence from scientific studies related to their patients' health problems</li> <li>obtain and apply information about their own population of patients and the larger population from which their patients are drawn</li> </ul>	<p>B5.01 The program must provide instruction to equip students with the necessary skills to search, interpret, and evaluate the medical literature in order to maintain a critical, current, and operational knowledge of new medical findings including its application to individualized patient care.</p> <p>B2.12 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in concepts of public health as they relate to the role of the practicing PA.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>apply knowledge of study designs and statistical methods to the appraisal of clinical studies and other information on diagnostic and therapeutic effectiveness</li> <li>apply information technology to manage information, access on-line medical information, and support their own education</li> </ul>	<p>ANNOTATION: Instruction in concepts of public health includes an appreciation of the public health system and the role of health care providers in the prevention of disease and maintenance of population health. It includes participating in disease surveillance, reporting and intervention.</p> <p>B2.10 The program must provide instruction to equip students with the necessary skills to search, interpret, and evaluate the medical literature in order to maintain a critical, current, and operational knowledge of new medical findings including its application to individualized patient care. B2.10 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction to prepare students to search, interpret and evaluate the medical literature, including its application to individualized patient care.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>facilitate the learning of students and/or other health care professionals</li> </ul>	<p>ANNOTATION: This instruction assists students in maintaining a critical, current and operational knowledge of new medical findings required for the prevention and treatment of disease. Instruction often includes topics such as framing of research questions, sampling methods, interpretation of basic biostatistical methods, and the limits of medical research. The use of common medical databases to access medical literature is also included.</p> <p>Introduction: Education <i>should</i> be provided in a manner that promotes interprofessional</p>

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- recognize and appropriately address gender, cultural, cognitive, emotional and other biases;

gaps in medical knowledge; and physical limitations in themselves and others

**SYSTEMS-BASED PRACTICE:** Systems-based practice encompasses the societal, organizational and economic environments in which health care is delivered. Physician assistants must demonstrate an awareness of and responsiveness to the larger system of health care to provide patient care that is of optimal value. PAs should work to improve the larger health care system of which their practices are a part. Physician assistants are expected to:

- use information technology to support patient care decisions and patient education

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education and practice.

Definitions: Diversity: Differences within and between groups of people that contribute to variations in habits, practices, beliefs, and values

B1.06 The curriculum *must* include instruction to prepare students to provide medical care to patients from diverse populations.

ANNOTATION: Quality health care education involves an ongoing consideration of the constantly changing health care system and the impact of racial, ethnic and socioeconomic health disparities on health care delivery. Instruction related to medical care and *diversity* prepares students to evaluate their own values and avoid stereotyping. It assists them in becoming aware of differing health beliefs, values and expectations of patients and other health care professionals that can affect communication, decision-making, compliance and health outcomes.

B2.10 The program curriculum *must* include instruction to prepare students to search, interpret and evaluate the medical literature, including its application to individualized

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- effectively interact with different types of medical practice and delivery systems
- understand the funding sources and payment systems that provide coverage for patient care

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patient care.

ANNOTATION: This instruction assists students in maintaining a critical, current and operational knowledge of new medical findings required for the prevention and treatment of disease. Instruction often includes topics such as framing of research questions, sampling methods, interpretation of basic biostatistical methods, and the limits of medical research. The use of common medical databases to access medical literature is also included.

B2.11 The program curriculum *must* include instruction in health care delivery systems and health policy.

B2.15 The program curriculum *must* include instruction regarding reimbursement, documentation of care, coding and billing.

Competencies	Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>practice cost-effective health care and resource allocation that does not compromise quality of care</li> <li>advocate for quality patient care and assist patients in dealing with system complexities</li> </ul>	<p>B2.11 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction in health care delivery systems and health policy.</p> <p>B1.06 The curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction to prepare students to provide medical care to patients from diverse populations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>partner with supervising physicians, health care managers and other health care providers to assess, coordinate, and improve the delivery of health care and patient outcomes</li> <li>accept responsibility for promoting a safe environment for patient care and recognizing and correcting systems-based factors that negatively impact patient care</li> <li>apply medical information and clinical data systems to provide more effective, efficient patient care</li> </ul>	<p>ANNOTATION: Quality health care education involves an ongoing consideration of the constantly changing health care system and the impact of racial, ethnic and socioeconomic health disparities on health care delivery. Instruction related to medical care and <i>diversity</i> prepares students to evaluate their own values and avoid stereotyping. It assists them in becoming aware of differing health beliefs, values and expectations of patients and other health care professionals that can affect communication, decision-making, compliance and health outcomes.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use the systems responsible for the appropriate payment of services</li> </ul>	<p>B2.15 The program curriculum <i>must</i> include instruction regarding reimbursement, documentation of care, coding and billing.</p>

