



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

## NOTES TO PROGRAMS Spring, 2013

Below are many important Notes to all programs. Some provide clarification and some refer to documents to be posted on the ARC-PA web site Accreditation Resource page (<http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/resources/>). Others are or will be reflected in edited versions of the Policy Documents, *Standards* and Accreditation Manual.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY EXCERPTS FROM MARCH, 2013 MEETING

#### Accreditation Actions as of April 1, 2013

- Acknowledged 15 new PD, 13 New IPD program changes, 8 new MD program changes, 1 IMD change
  - 18 Continuing program applications
  - 4 Provisional program applications
  - 1 clinical postgraduate application
  - 1 special visit report
  - 5 Program changes
  - 8 Program reports
  - 24 Expedited Reviews (14 reports due, 77 program changes)
- ([Accreditation actions](#) are posted on the ARC-PA web site after each meeting and after all programs have been notified of commission decisions)

The total number of **entry-level** accredited programs as of April 1, 2013 is **173**.

The total number of **clinical postgraduate** accredited programs at present is **8**.

#### Projected Workload

- The current projected workload includes an additional **74** new programs for provisional accreditation consideration through July 1, 2017.
- While the need for PA healthcare providers remains strong, the commission is concerned about the availability of clinical education sites for all types of healthcare students and qualified program leadership and faculty.

## ACCREDITATION PROCESS CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION

Each program director of an accredited and applicant program was sent a letter in December, 2012, or January, 2013 concerning the impact of the changes to the accreditation process on their programs. The ARC-PA made changes to the list of programs on its upcoming commission agendas to accommodate the changes. Thirty-four programs were moved from one ARC-PA agenda to another based on their accreditation histories and the fact that some programs had not yet been reviewed with the *Standards*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

The ARC-PA is in the midst of the transition phase to the new process and changes will be implemented over several years. Each group of programs on the upcoming March and September commission meeting agendas will be affected by the transition. **It is important for programs to note that many of the dates related to materials submission are based on the dates of their validation review site visit.** Site visits often occur months before a program is discussed at a commission meeting.

The ARC-PA is distributing new application materials as they become available, with the goal of having materials to programs one year in advance of their submission deadlines. Below is a summary of some of the changes and their dates of implementation by calendar and ARC-PA commission agenda.

**Currently available:** Distant campus feasibility study and application (on website)

**June 2013:** New SV agenda being piloted; new distant campus review process being piloted

**November 2013:** Invoice billing for 18 month period (fee structure available on [website](#))

### By commission agenda

2014M: First provisional applicant programs to use new feasibility guide and submit 6 months prior to SV.

2014J: Review of clinical postgraduate programs for accreditation action, yearly as needed (new process)

2014S: Use of new SV template (not customized by program); first provisional monitoring visit

2015M: First continuing programs to have application materials submitted 12 weeks early

2015S: New continuing application, new SSR document (to be submitted with application)

2016S: Begin submitting SSR two years before visit; customized SV designed by ARC-PA for each program based on all documents submitted and reviewed during the interval between previous and current commission review.

## ACCREDITATION PROGRAM MANAGEMENT PORTAL UPDATE

All accredited programs submitted their Program Required Annual Report to the ARC-PA December 31, 2012. (Entry-level programs that were first accredited in September 2012 and all clinical postgraduate programs have their reports due March 31, 2013.) The ARC-PA is in the

process of reviewing all submitted reports. A separate Portal Pointers document will be forthcoming from the ARC-PA.

***Only those authorized by the program director should enter or edit data in the portal. Sharing of log in and password information is in violation of the terms of usage of the portal.***

The ARC-PA refers to the program portal data routinely for contact information for program faculty and institution administrators, as well as other data that was in the past collected via the Institution and Program data sheet. **It is imperative and required that programs keep their portal data accurate, particularly in terms of personnel.** Programs should **NOT** delete personnel from the portal but should contact Mercedes Beard for assistance.

The ARC-PA staff plan to conduct webinars aimed at assisting program staff members in entering data. Newly accredited provisional programs will be invited to participate in a webinar this summer. Additional webinars will be offered for staff and faculty entering data in the personnel and SCPE sections of the Portal later this year.

The link to the Portal is found in the upper right hand corner of the [ARC-PA](#) web site. Questions about use of the portal should be submitted to the portal team at the email located on the bottom of each page of the portal ([portalfeedback@arc-pa.org](mailto:portalfeedback@arc-pa.org) ).

### **DISTANT CAMPUS EXPANSION POLICY AND PROCESS REVISED**

Programs considering expansion to a distant campus should review the new process requirements, diagram, required feasibility study components and format and application materials presently available on the web at <http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/resources/program-change-forms/>

The timing for approval in advance of student enrollment at the distant campus is six months:

- E1.08 The program *must* obtain ARC-PA approval at least six months prior to implementing any intended program expansion to a *distant campus*.

ANNOTATION: Programs providing information about expanding to a *distant campus* do so using forms and processes developed by the ARC-PA for this purpose. A site visit will be required as a component of the application process to expand to a distant campus.

Programs with an accreditation status of Accreditation-Continued are eligible to apply for expansion to a distant campus if, at the time of application submission, they have maintained five successive years of Accreditation-Continued without an adverse action.

Programs with an accreditation status of Accreditation-Provisional are eligible to apply two years after completion of the provisional accreditation process as long as they have not had an adverse action during that period of time.<sup>1</sup>

The rate at which programs can initiate new distant campuses cannot be more frequent than once every two to three years, depending on the length of the PA program. A program must have outcomes from the first cohort of students at any distant campus before applying for another distant campus.

### **STANDARDS CLARIFICATION AND INTERPRETATION**

Annotations are an integral component of the standards with which they are associated. This does not mean the body of the standard is to be ignored in interpreting the standard. Programs should anticipate additional clarifying language to be included in annotations later this year.

The following points of clarification are provided for standards about which questions are often asked.

#### Standard A3.14

A3.14 The program *must* define, publish and make *readily available* to enrolled and *prospective students* general program information to include: b) the success of the program in achieving its *goals*,

ANNOTATION: The program is expected to publish on its web site the PANCE performance data of its graduates by publishing the NCCPA PANCE Pass Rate Summary Report, as provided by the NCCPA through its program portal, of the most recent five-year first time. The program is expected to update this performance data in a timely manner. The program may supplement this information with concise and factually accurate evidence of the soundness of its operation and its overall effectiveness in meeting its mission. Examples of information may include graduation rates, job placement rates and attrition rates.

This standard refers to more than just PANCE results. It requires that the program define, publish and make readily available its success in achieving its goals. By implication, the program must have goals against which to measure its success. The standard is about providing information to the public concerning the program's successes. The USDE and CHEA expect accrediting agencies to require that programs publish their outcomes. The only across-the-board outcome for all PA programs is the PANCE exam. The ARC-PA believes it imperative that each program provide reliable information to the public regarding graduates' first time performance on the national certifying exam. Thus, the annotation indicates that programs need to publish the results of the PANCE, by use of official NCCPA reports, on the website. This does not preclude a program from providing additional information regarding the overall performance on the national certifying exam. The annotation's reference to supplemental information is generic and offers a

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<sup>1</sup> Applicable to programs accredited September 2012 and beyond. Programs with provisional accreditation awarded prior to September 2012 have different eligibility requirements and should contact the ARC-PA for clarification.

means by which programs are encouraged to provide factually accurate evidence of effectiveness.

The annotation is *not* meant to imply that the *ONLY* “success” that program needs to publish is the PANCE report, but that particular outcome is required of ALL programs. (CHEA plans to randomly monitor program websites of programs accredited by CHEA recognized accrediting agencies to determine if programs are in compliance.)

The body of the standard requires that programs address their goals (plural). Programs have goals; the ARC-PA asks about them and sees them in application materials and on web sites. In order to publish success in meeting goals, programs must develop measurable goals, those with expectations.

To be in compliance with the standard, the program is expected to prominently place a link on the home page of the program’s web page that clearly indicates Graduate Performance on Certification Exam. This should link to a copy of the five-year first time graduate performance report pdf document, or to another section in the web site with the pdf document, from the NCCPA (NCCPA PANCE Pass Rate Summary Report) available to programs from the NCCPA portal.

#### Standards Related to Program Expectations and Requirements for Practice

Standard B1.09, often referred to as the “objectives standard,” is a very meaty standard. The body of the standard states, “For **each** didactic and clinical course, the **program must define** and publish instructional objectives that **guide student acquisition of required competencies.**” The annotation continues to provide information about objectives as they relate to expectations of the students. “Instructional objectives stated in measurable terms allow assessment of student progress in **developing the competencies required for entry into practice.** They **address learning expectations of students** and the **level of student performance required** for success.”

Standards B3.02-B3.07 are those that relate to the supervised clinical practice components of the program. C standards also relate to these in terms of evaluation. It is often helpful to think of these interrelated standards by the major category they address.

- types of patient encounters (B3.02),
- types of care patients are seeking (B3.03),
- settings in which SCPE must occur (B3.04),
- people with whom the students should work to obtain those experiences (B3.05, B3.06, B3.07)

Standard B3.02 has two important points. SCPEs must enable students 1) to meet **program expectations** and 2) acquire the **competencies needed for clinical PA practice.**

In addressing care across the life span, women's health, conditions requiring surgical management and care for behavioral and mental health conditions, Standard B3.03 also addresses the issue that the SCPEs must provide sufficient patient exposure to allow each student **to meet program-defined requirements.**

Standard C4.02 requires that the program must document that each clinical site provides the student access to physical facilities, patient populations and supervision necessary **to fulfill program expectations of the clinical experience.**

The ARC-PA reviews programs keeping in mind that programs need to express their expectations in a way that is clear to the student and the faculty, to include the preceptors. Program faculty are encouraged to ask themselves the questions that the ARC-PA asks in relation to these and other related standards.

- Has the program clearly stated its expectations of students in a manner that will be clear to the student and the preceptor and guide student learning for the time frame of the experience?
- Are the expectations ones that are reasonable to be accomplished in the time frame for the experiences?
- What critical clinical experiences and exposures that tie the didactic curriculum to the clinical curriculum will all students have had upon graduation?
- Are the expectations appropriate to prepare the student for entry into clinical practice as a PA?
- Can the program support its expectations with the SCPE sites it has selected for the experiences?
- Does the program have an effective method of monitoring the students to be sure they are achieving the expectations and, if not, to offer experiences that do such that all students are prepared upon program completion?
- Does the program have an effective method of monitoring the sites use for SCPE to be sure they offer what is needed for the students to be successful in meeting the defined expectations?

### **WEIGH IN ON WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS**

Discussion topics for the Executive Committee summer retreat include the topics below. Program directors are invited to submit their thoughts on these topics to the ARC-PA **no later than May 31, 2013** to a special mail box for such comments at [transparency@arc-pa.org](mailto:transparency@arc-pa.org)

In keeping with requirements looming on the horizon by the USDE and CHEA for more and more transparency of actions by accrediting agencies and outcomes from programs, the ARC-PA will be discussing the following:

- The line between transparency and confidentiality of accreditation actions and program outcomes
- Requiring an expected PANCE minimum score for the first graduating class of a new program and after three years for programs that transition from accreditation-provisional to accreditation-continuing.

- Requiring an expected PANCE minimum score for the most recent five years of graduates for program with accreditation-continuing.
- Addressing an expected PANCE minimum score for all accredited programs in any single year.
- Posting an adverse accreditation action prior to reconsideration or appeal on the ARC-PA web site list of accredited programs, with a notation that the action is “pending” or “subject to appeal.”
- Requiring programs that are undergoing reconsideration or appeal for an adverse accreditation action to post that information prominently on its web site.
- Requiring programs that are undergoing reconsideration or appeal for an adverse accreditation action to notify current students and active applicants for a class position of such in writing.
- Since per the *Standards* (E1.09e) the ARC-PA approves the class size, eliminate the concept of maximum aggregate enrollment and the 15% rule for the *Standards*, with limited or no variance above the approved class size.

Additional topics on the table for discussion by the ARC-PA include:

- Limiting the distance from the main campus for an SCPE for a required program rotation.
- Requiring justification from a program for establishing SCPEs at great distances and states from their programs. The justification would need to address communication the program had with other accredited PA programs in the area of the proposed site, that might actually be closer geographically to and use the site for an SCPE.
- Establishing a maximum class size for any program.

Remember, Program directors are invited to submit their thoughts on these topics to the ARC-PA no later than May 31, 2013 to a special mail box for such comments at [transparency@arc-pa.org](mailto:transparency@arc-pa.org)

### **ARC-PA WORKSHOPS**

The ARC-PA encourages currently accredited programs to consider sending program representatives to its summer Accreditation and You workshop in St. Louis, Missouri, July 21-23, 2013. A link to the workshop page is on the News page of the ARC-PA web site and here.

<http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/resources/workshops-and-conferences/>

### **DEGREE DEADLINE REMINDER**

The *Standards* require that programs which do not currently offer a graduate degree *must* transition to conferring a graduate degree upon all PA students who matriculate into the program after 2020. The degree *should* be awarded by the sponsoring institution.

Programs that are housed in institutions unable to offer a graduate degree, those that do not yet offer a graduate degree or those that currently affiliate with an institutions separate from their sponsoring institutions should review the ARC-PA document about the *Standards* degree deadline, available on the ARC-PA web site [Accreditation Resources Page](#).

Programs should review the [Change forms page](#) of the ARC-PA website to find the forms needed and steps required to demonstrate compliance with the degree requirement. There are separate forms for programs changing degrees within their own institutions and those affiliated with a separate institution.

### **QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?**

Programs that have questions or comments about these Notes, or any issue related to the accreditation process are encouraged to contact the ARC-PA by email or phone. All contact information is posted on the ARC-PA web site at <http://www.arc-pa.org/contact/staff/>