



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

**Accreditation Standards for
Post-Professional PA Doctoral Programs[©]
First Edition**

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Change Notifications:

11/17/25 – Standard C1001 revised to remove the requirements for the sufficiency of resources related to technology and the effectiveness of resources related to technology.

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ARC-PA POST-PROFESSIONAL PA DOCTORAL STANDARDS

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STANDARDS FORMAT

Italics are used to reflect words and terms defined in the glossary of this document.

INTRODUCTION

The PA profession has evolved over time, now requiring a higher level of academic rigor than in its early history. Institutions that sponsor Post-Professional PA Doctoral Programs (PPDP) are expected to incorporate this high academic rigor into their programs and award an appropriate doctoral degree. It is also essential to create an environment that is not exclusionary of any group or culture. A variety of expertise, perspectives, and resources increases the overall high-quality impact the PA profession can have on patients, learners, and the global community.

ELIGIBILITY (ADDITIONALLY COVERED IN D)

The ARC-PA only accredits qualified PPDPs offered by or located within institutions chartered by and physically located within the United States. Qualified programs are those that, at a minimum, meet the Accreditation Standards, including all eligibility Standards in Section D.

PROGRAM REVIEW

Accreditation of PPDPs is a voluntary process initiated by the sponsoring institution. The process includes a comprehensive review of the program relative to the Standards. The PPDP and the sponsoring institution are responsible for demonstrating compliance with the Standards. Accreditation decisions are based on the ARC-PA's evaluation of information contained in the accreditation application, the report submitted by the site visit team, any additional requested reports or documents submitted to the ARC-PA by the program, and the program's accreditation history. Graduation from an ARC-PA accredited PPDP does not confer eligibility to sit for the PANCE.

SECTION A: ADMINISTRATION

INTRODUCTION

The administrative operation of a PPDP involves collaboration between the faculty and administrative staff of the program and the sponsoring institution. The program will provide an environment that fosters intellectual challenge and a spirit of inquiry. The sponsoring institution will be committed to the program's success and will effectively oversee operations and personnel. Well-defined policies will reflect institutional accreditation requirements and the mission, goals, and competencies of the program and sponsoring institution. Program documents will accurately reflect lines of institutional, programmatic, and individual responsibility. Adequate resources will be devoted to supporting the program in accomplishing its mission.

A1 INSTITUTIONAL SPONSORSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

- A1001 The sponsoring institution of higher education is authorized under applicable law or other acceptable authority to provide a program of postsecondary education and has appropriate doctoral degree-granting authority. This includes state authorization, if required by the state, and accreditation of the institution by a nationally recognized accrediting body in the *United States*.
- A1002 The mission of the program is aligned with the mission of the academic department, college, school, or institution in which it resides.
- A1003 The sponsoring institution is responsible for:
- a) ensuring effective program leadership.
 - b) ensuring effective program administration.
 - c) complying with ARC-PA Accreditation Standards and policies.

A2 INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

- A2001 The sponsoring institution provides the program with *sufficient* financial resources to operate the educational program and fulfill the program's obligations from recruitment through graduation.
- A2002 The sponsoring institution provides the program with the human resources necessary to operate the educational program, comply with the Standards, and fulfill obligations to matriculating and enrolled *learners*, including *sufficient*:
- a) *program faculty*.
 - b) *administrative staff*.
- A2003 The sponsoring institution provides the program with *sufficient* resources to ensure *learner* acquisition of *competencies*. The resources include the following:
- a) educational materials.
 - b) educational technology resources and support.
 - c) research and IRB support for the required curriculum.
 - d) course development support.
 - e) instructional design support.
 - f) library or *equivalent* digital resources.
- A2004 The sponsoring institution provides the program with *sufficient* resources, including:
- a) *student support services*.
 - b) financial aid support.
 - c) disability and ADA support.
- A2005 The sponsoring institution provides the program with reliable IT support services that meet the needs of the program.

- A2006 If the program requires clinical experiences outside of the scope of the *learner's* employment, the responsibilities of the respective institutions for the supervision of *learners* are clearly described and documented in a manner signifying agreement by the involved institutions. Signed and executed affiliation agreement(s) define the responsibilities of each party related to the educational program for *learners*, including:
- whose policies govern specific activities or processes.
 - learner* access to educational resources and clinical experiences.

A3 PROGRAM PERSONNEL

- A3001 The program has a designated program director who:
- has at least three (3) years of higher education experience.
 - holds a doctoral degree.
- A3002 *Program faculty* include at least one 1.0 FTE PA-C (or emeritus) *faculty* member(s) made up of no more than two individual people.
- A3003 *Administrative staff* include at least 1.0 FTE.
- A3004 *Principal faculty* and the program director have academic appointments and privileges *comparable* to other *faculty* with similar academic responsibilities in the institution.
- A3005 *Program faculty* maintain responsibility for the following:
- developing, reviewing, and revising as necessary the mission statement, *goals*, and *competencies* of the program.
 - selecting applicants for admission to the program.
 - providing *learner* instruction.
 - evaluating *learner* performance.
 - academic counseling of *learners*.
 - designing, implementing, coordinating, and evaluating the curriculum.
 - evaluating the program.
- A3006 All *program faculty*:
- meet program-defined academic and experiential qualifications to teach in their assigned instructional areas.
 - are evaluated in their assigned instructional areas.
 - are granted *sufficient* time and resources needed for performance improvement.
- A3007 The *principal faculty* and program director have *sufficient* and relevant professional development time and financial resources, commensurate with their appointment FTE percentage, including at a minimum:
- continuing medical education to maintain the license and certification required in the job description.
 - annual renewal of relevant licensure and certification.
 - development of teaching skills related to the method of curriculum delivery.

A4 OPERATIONS AND POLICIES

A4001 The program defines, publishes, makes *readily available*, and consistently applies written policies and procedures that govern *learners* as they enter, progress through, and graduate from the program. These include policies relevant to:

- a) academic recruitment and admissions.
- b) degree requirements, including timelines and deadlines.
- c) financial assistance.
- d) *learner* performance evaluation, feedback, and advisement.
- e) *learner* retention.
- f) *learner* progression and deceleration.
- g) *learner* withdrawal.
- h) *learner* dismissal.
- i) due process, grievance, and appeals.
- j) *learner* rights and responsibilities, conduct, and professionalism expectations.
- k) nondiscrimination and *mistreatment*.

A4002 The sponsoring institution and program's publications and advertising *accurately* reflect the program offered.

A4003 The program defines, publishes, and makes *readily available* to the public general program information including:

- a) the program's ARC-PA accreditation status as provided by the ARC-PA.
- b) the program's mission, *goals*, and *purpose*.
- c) evidence of its *effectiveness* in meeting its *goals*.
- d) all *program faculty*.
- e) all required curricular components.
- f) program-defined *learning outcomes* and *competencies*.
- g) academic credit offered by the program.
- h) estimates of the total cost of attendance related to the program.
- i) refund policies.

A4004 The program defines, publishes, consistently applies, and makes *readily available* to the public its admission and enrollment practices that address:

- a) favored or preferred specified characteristics, individuals, or groups (if applicable).
- b) prior education.
- c) awarding or granting *advanced placement*.
- d) required work experience.

A4005 The program makes *learner* admission decisions in accordance with clearly defined and *published* practices of the institution and program.

A4006 Programs that grant *advanced placement* keep documentation within each *learner's* file verifying competency for the curricular components in which *advanced placement* is given.

A5 FACULTY RECORDS

A5001 *Program faculty* records include:

- a) current job descriptions that include duties, responsibilities, and required qualifications specific to each *faculty* member.
- b) current curriculum vitae.
- c) appointment letter or contract.
- d) percent effort (FTE) dedicated to the doctoral program.

SECTION B: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

B1 CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

B1001 The curriculum is consistent with the:

- a) program mission.
- b) program *goals*.
- c) program *competencies*.

B1002 The curriculum instruction maps to the program-defined *competencies* in a way that demonstrates where *competencies* are taught and assessed.

B1003 At least 60% of the *program curriculum* is taken once enrolled in the doctoral program at the degree-granting institution.

B1004 For each course, the program defines and publishes for students the following detailed information in syllabi or appendix to the syllabi:

- a) course name.
- b) course description.
- c) outline of topics to be covered.
- d) course *learning outcomes*.
- e) course *instructional objectives*.
- f) *faculty* instructor of record.
- g) detailed description of each *learner* assessment(s)/evaluation(s).
- h) grading plan.

B1005 The curriculum includes instruction in the following leadership concepts:

- a) strategic thinking.
- b) fiduciary responsibility.
- c) professional advocacy.
- d) developing high-performing teams.
- e) outcome assessment.
- f) quality improvement processes.

B1006 The curriculum includes a *doctoral-level*, program-defined capstone or culminating project that is a required component to be completed by all graduates.

B1007 The curriculum includes instruction in the following areas, consistent with the program's focus:

- a) theories.
- b) policies and legal aspects.

B1008 If the program includes courses that are primarily clinical internships or practicums, the experiences and preceptors:

- a) are evaluated with documentation maintained by the program to include *learner* evaluation of the preceptor and clinical site.
- b) enable the *learners* to meet the program-defined *learning outcomes*.

B2 ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

B2001 The program conducts *frequent*, objective, and documented evaluations of *learner* performance to ensure *learners* meet the program's *learning outcomes* for all curricular components.

- a) The evaluations align with what is expected and taught.
- b) The evaluations allow the program to identify *learners'* deficiencies in achieving *learning outcomes* in a *timely* manner.
- c) The program addresses deficiencies in a *timely* manner.
- d) The evaluations and outcomes are documented in the *learner's* record.

B2002 The program documents the equivalency of options for experiences and achievement of *learning outcomes* when instruction for *learners* in the same educational track is:

- a) conducted in different settings and/or
- b) provided by different pedagogical and instructional methods or techniques.

SECTION C: EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

The program will have a robust and systematic process of ongoing self-assessment to review its quality and effectiveness. This process will be conducted within the context of the mission and goals of both the sponsoring institution and the program by using the Accreditation Standards as a point of reference. A well-developed process occurs in an ongoing format and across all program phases. It includes analysis of direct and indirect data (both quantitative and qualitative) collected from learners, graduates, faculty, and staff, as applicable. It critically analyzes all aspects of the program by trends and comparisons of data from multiple sources. Ongoing assessment is used to identify strengths and areas needing improvement and leads to the development of plans for corrective intervention when needed. The data sources specified are considered minimums.

C1 ONGOING PROGRAM SELF-ASSESSMENT

C1001 The program's self-assessment process documents program *effectiveness* and fosters program improvement. At a minimum, the process includes:

- a) admissions.
- b) *effectiveness* of the curriculum in preparing *learners* to achieve program *competencies*.
- c) *sufficiency* of *faculty* and *staff*.
- d) *effectiveness* of *faculty* and *staff*.
- e) success in meeting the program's *goals*.

C1002 The program prepares a self-study report as part of the accreditation application that *accurately* and *succinctly* documents the implementation of the self-assessment process (data gathering and critical *analysis*) and its results, leading to conclusions identifying strengths and areas needing improvement with appropriate action plans.

SECTION D: ELIGIBILITY FOR ACCREDITATION

INTRODUCTION

The accreditation process begins with determining institutional eligibility to sponsor a program. The process involves a thorough review of the planning, organization, evaluation, and proposed/actual content of a program in the advanced planning stages. The program will be subject to denial of accreditation and denial of future eligibility for accreditation if any of the statements or answers made in documents or the application are false.

D1 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

D1001 Programs applying for accreditation demonstrate compliance with all accreditation Standards, or a specific plan to comply when operational. Specifically:

- a) The program is offered by, or located within, institutions chartered by and physically located within the *United States*.
- b) A single institution is clearly identified as the program's sponsor and is authorized under applicable law to provide a doctoral program.
- c) The sponsoring institution is accredited by, and in good standing with, a national *institutional accrediting agency* and is authorized by that agency to confer a doctoral degree.
- d) The curriculum and policies are approved by the institutional process before the site visit.
- e) At the time of application, the program has:
 - i. a program director responsible for the administration and management of the program.
 - ii. a chief administrative officer or designee assigned to be responsible for the development of the program. The ARC-PA does not consider a *consultant* to be an appropriate designee.

ACCREDITATION MAINTENANCE POLICIES

Based on the data contained in any reports and documents, the program may be required to submit additional information, may be scheduled for an onsite evaluation, may have the length of time between *comprehensive evaluation* visits changed, or may have its accreditation status altered.

REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The program will inform the ARC-PA within twenty (20) business days of the program's knowledge of any:
 - a) change in the accrediting agency for the sponsoring institution.
 - b) adverse accreditation action (probation, withdrawal of accreditation) received from the sponsoring institution's accrediting agency.
2. The program will agree to and cooperate with periodic comprehensive and/or focused program reviews by the ARC-PA. Such reviews may include a site visit, which is scheduled as determined by the ARC-PA.
3. The program will submit reports or documents as required by the ARC-PA.
4. The program will inform the ARC-PA in writing of personnel changes of its program director (or interim) within fifteen (15) business days of the *vacancy*.
5. The program will demonstrate *active* recruitment to permanently fill vacated or interim program director positions. The program will provide an initial plan and quarterly updates to the ARC-PA on progress in filling open or interim program director positions.
6. An interim program director (IPD) will meet the qualifications of the program director.
7. The appointment of the interim program director (IPD) position *must*:
 - a) occur within fifteen (15) business days of the *vacancy*.
 - b) not exceed 12 months.
8. The program will notify the ARC-PA in writing, using forms and processes developed by the ARC-PA, no less than six (6) months before implementation of proposed changes in the following:
 - a) the program expands to an additional site.
 - b) requirements for program completion/graduation.
 - c) the curriculum that results in an increase in the *learner* tuition.
 - d) program length, greater than one month.
 - e) degree or certificate granted at program completion.
9. The program will inform the ARC-PA in writing within 30 calendar days, using forms and processes developed by the ARC-PA, when it encounters a substantive decrease in fiscal support of:
 - a) 20% or more decrease in overall budget or for program expenditures.
 - b) 5% or more decrease in its operating budget.

10. The program and the sponsoring institution will pay ARC-PA accreditation and associated fees as determined by the ARC-PA.

GLOSSARY

NOTE: Where terms are not defined, their definitions are at the discretion of the ARC-PA.

TERM	DEFINITION
Accurately	Free from error.
Active	Having practical operation or results, characterized by action rather than by contemplation or speculation.
Administrative Staff (Staff)	Those individuals who provide administrative, secretarial, or clerical help to the program. Administrative staff do not include other staff working in or with the program who are assigned a traditional faculty role or those who function to provide technical assistance for instructional technology or data analysis.
Advanced Placement	A waiver of required coursework included in the curriculum for applicants to the program and/or a waiver of required coursework included in the curriculum for currently enrolled learners in the program, which results in the learner advancing in the curriculum without completing required curriculum components at the sponsoring institution.
Analysis	Study of compiled or tabulated data from multiple sources by interpreting data comparisons and trends, with the subsequent understanding and conclusions used to validate current practices or make changes as needed for program improvement.
Attrition	A reduction in number. Learner attrition: the permanent loss of a matriculated learner from their original cohort. Faculty/Staff attrition: the loss of a faculty or staff member from a position assigned to the program and calculated based on FTE (not headcount).
Comparable	Demonstrated to be similar but not necessarily identical.
Competencies	The program-defined, measurable outcomes, regardless of what the program titles them (e.g., program outcomes), that include the applicable knowledge, skills, reasoning and problem-solving abilities, and professional behaviors required for program completion.
Consultant	An individual from within or outside the sponsoring institution who provides advice to the program but who is not hired by the program to serve as program faculty or staff.
Doctoral level	Doctoral level entails a rigorous academic pursuit characterized by advanced and focused study and research beyond the master's level, culminating in individuals' preparation for specialized expertise and scholarly contributions.
Effectiveness	The degree to which objectives are achieved and the extent to which problems are solved.
Equivalent	Resulting in the same level of outcome achievement or end results.
Formative Evaluation	Intermediate or continuous evaluation that may include feedback to help learners in achieving outcomes and goals.

TERM	DEFINITION
Frequent	Occurring regularly at brief intervals.
Goals	The end toward which effort is directed.
Institutional Accrediting Agencies	<p>Examples include:</p> <p>Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools-Commission on Colleges (SACS COC) WASC Senior College & University Commission (WSCUC)</p>
Instructional Objectives	Statements that describe measurable and observable actions or behaviors the learner will be able to demonstrate after completing a unit of instruction.
Learner	A participant who enrolls in the post-professional doctoral program; a student in the program.
Learning Outcomes	The program-defined, measurable outcomes, that include the applicable knowledge, skills, reasoning and problem-solving abilities, and professional behaviors required for course completion.
Mistreatment	<p>Mistreatment is any behavior that disrespects the dignity of others or interferes with the learning process. It can be intentional or unintentional.</p> <p>Examples of <i>mistreatment</i> include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination: Denying opportunities based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other protected category • Humiliation: Publicly belittling or humiliating someone • Physical or psychological punishment: Threatening or actually inflicting physical harm • Unfair treatment: Intentionally singling out someone for arbitrary treatment • Exploitation: Requiring that someone perform personal errands or exploiting them in any other way
Principal Faculty	Those faculty working at least 50% FTE assigned to the PPDP who report to the program director.
Program Curriculum	The courses required by the program to complete the degree.
Program Faculty/Faculty	The program director and any faculty member/instructor teaching in the program.
Published	Presented in written or electronic format.
Purpose	The value of program; how or why a program exists and advances the field; the value of student success.
Readily Available	Made accessible to others in a timely fashion via defined program or institution procedures. Navigation to digital content should take little effort or time.

TERM	DEFINITION
Remediation	The program defined and applied process for addressing deficiencies in a learner’s knowledge and skills, such that the correction of these deficiencies is measurable and is documented.
Student Support Services	Services aimed at helping students/learners reach their academic and career goals. Such services typically include academic advising, tutoring, career services, financial aid, student health, writing services, computing and library resources and access.
Succinctly	Marked by compact, precise expression without wasted words.
Sufficient	Enough to meet the needs of a situation or proposed end.
Timely	Without undue delay; As soon as feasible after giving considered deliberation.
United States	<p>The fifty States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Wake Island, the Midway Islands, Kingman Reef, and Johnston Island.</p> <p>Any active-duty US military member stationed abroad.</p> <p>A program may satisfy the requirement of clinical internships or experiences through medical facilities located in the <i>United States</i> and through a limited number of medical facilities accredited by the United States Joint Commission and operated by the American government under a signed Status of Forces Agreement with the host nation.</p>
Vacancy	A vacancy is created when an individual is not actively performing, able to perform, or accountable for the duties of their position due to termination, resignation, or absence (illness, terminal leave, sabbatical, etc.).