

UND SMHS Strategic Plan Individual Unit Report for 2023

GOAL 8 for **Physician Assistant Studies**

LEARNING

UND SMHS Strategic Plan Goal 8: *The SMHS will enhance its purposes of education, service, and discovery by focusing additional efforts toward achieving the broad goals stated in the School's Healthcare Workforce Initiative.*

1. Describe if/how your unit has addressed this goal.

The admission process for the DPAS involves a published preference for ND/bordering state residents as well as those from rural communities. The 5-year matriculant average data shows that 80% of matriculants are from the tri-state area (ND, MN & SD) and 49% are from ND. The most recent class accepted has 51% of students from ND which, while surely provides strength in meeting our mission, is cause for great concern in terms of clinical placement availability, especially with increased competition for clinical sites from medical and nurse practitioner students.

From a short survey of the graduating Class of 2022, 68% of graduates are working in primary care fields (five-year average of 65%). This is impressive given the national statistic of 24% of PAs working in primary care (2021 Statistical Profile of Certified Physician Assistants © NCCPA 2021). Also, within the same survey of the 2022 graduates, 54% are working in rural/underserved areas (53% 5-year average) and of these 46% are working in rural/underserved primary care.

2. Describe how your efforts are being assessed.

The matriculant data above shows how the DPAS is dedicated and continues to train PAs from ND and surrounding states. With the limiting factor of clinical site availability, we are past the "tipping point" of available clinical sites and may need to extend students beyond graduation to ensure achievement of instructional objectives and goals prior to the national certification exam. Conversations of adjusting enrollment numbers continue to be a topic of discussion due to the clinical site limitations. There is great concern for the sustainability of the current placement process and structure which will eventually lead to a smaller entering class size.

The graduate data above shows that the DPAS continues to meet the primary care mission along with the emphasis to rural/underserved populations. Consistently, UND PA graduates choose primary care fields at a much higher rate than evidenced by national data; and many of those graduates are in rural or underserved areas.

3. Describe how your unit analyzed these data and what assessments were determined.

The DPAS feels strongly about meeting the mission of the program which has been foundational over the past 53 years. The data is robust to support rural primary care and yet, there seems to be continued challenges for graduates to obtain employment in primary care. Graduates often desire positions in primary care; however, jobs are scarce with typical trends seen toward the specialties. Advocacy of the profession continues to be paramount to creating PA positions in clinical venues of interest.

Consistently, professional advocacy is a constant for faculty and students as the profession has less history than other health disciplines.

4. Describe how your unit will implement any further changes and what barriers may exist.

Ongoing discussions of clinical placement need to occur from a school-wide approach. Professional advocacy efforts are needed to encourage clinical practice sites and hospitals to expand hiring practices, by training and retaining PA students and clinicians. This may involve payment for preceptorships and legislative action and support. Due to changes in accreditation and the increased competition for sites, the current process is no longer sustainable, and we need to brainstorm alternative options together.

PROVIDE A RATING OF YOUR PROGRESS ON THIS GOAL: ● On Track