
UND SMHS Strategic Plan Individual Unit Report for 2020

GOAL 2 for **Physician Assistant Studies**

LEARNING

One UND Strategic Plan Goal 2: Increase undergraduate, graduate, and professional graduation rates.

UND SMHS Strategic Plan Goal 2: SMHS Units will expand their current systems of student support to ensure continued high graduation rates and improve student satisfaction with the overall quality of their education.

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

The DPAS has expanded opportunities for student support by assigning students to faculty advisors at the time of orientation allowing for earlier involvement and intervention as needed for students struggling academically, personally or professionally. Further, faculty advisors are recommending timely institutional student support services (student success center, disability support services, counseling center, student health center, etc) for students needing assistance in any way. Lastly, and likely most important, is a closer look at the admission process searching for key predictors of academic success. The admissions team is considering overall GPA, science GPA, levels of institutional rigor and clinical hours as a start. As a department, we strive to accept the most qualified applicants with the strongest indicators of success to become future health care providers.

There are also two questions on the final program assessment related to student satisfaction with the program and workforce preparedness. These are reviewed annually after each class completes their program assessment and longitudinally as required by each accreditation interval.

2. Describe how your efforts are being assessed.

Assessment of student support occur during faculty conferencing when discussing student performance and progress. Graduation rates are evaluated annually as part of the program goals required by accreditation. These are updated and posted on the DPAS website each summer. Graduation rates are compared to other health sciences programs within the UND SMHS along with national rates, when available. The DPAS assessment team analyzes the data to make determinations and suggest modifications for full faculty consideration.

As mentioned above, student satisfaction and workforce preparation are reviewed annually with the final program assessment completed by students and longitudinally as required by accreditation timeline intervals.

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

The 5-year graduation rate for the DPAS is 91% which is comparable to medicine (91%) and slightly lower than health sciences overall (PT-96%; OT-94%; Vital Signs 2019). The most recently published national rate (2018 cohort) is 93%. All factors are considered in terms of rationale for deceleration, withdrawal, and dismissals.

Several factors come into consideration regarding student retention and satisfaction. For many PA students, this is a second career choice after several years in a health professional role. Students have been away from coursework and struggle to refine study habits and time management skills. This combined with an intense curriculum in basic sciences is, at times, unsurmountable for some students.

Additionally, students have many life events occurring both with their immediate families and extended families (children needing care, aging parents, etc). Taking a step further, the intensity of undergraduate coursework and resultant science GPA is a key factor in the admission process. Lastly, the class size is low comparatively to national averages and therefore one student choosing to withdraw/dismissal makes a large impact (UND is accredited for 35 students/year compared the national average of 46 students/year).

In terms of student satisfaction, the greater majority (96% for the Class of 2020) are glad they attended the UND PA Program; however, there is typically 1-2/year who wish they would have attended a more traditional model program or would have gone to medical school. Further, the greater majority (90% for the Class of 2020) feel well-prepared for the workforce while those who don't are usually neutral at the point of graduation (many factors weigh in here, especially apprehension of passing boards and beginning a medical practice).

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

Recognizing the growth in PA programs over the past 5 years (33% increase in five years – 196 programs in 2015 to 260 in 2020 and 47 more programs in the que by April 2023), the DPAS continues a thorough evaluation of multiple admission factors to continue work to find the best predictors of success as a PA student and as a future health care provider. The current admission process begins with a very thorough screening process involving all five members of the admission team prior to selecting students to come to campus for the six-station holistic multi-mini interview process. While applicant numbers keep rising (over 1200 to date with one month left of this interview cycle), the numbers of strong, qualified applicants is not, which is likely due to the numbers of programs and the national job rankings (#2 in best health care jobs and #3 for best jobs overall – US News). Although the program utilizes an electronic centralized application service, prospective applicant advising and enrollment management actually becomes a barrier due to the workload and small staff/faculty complement. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic provides a challenge as to how to host the admission interview process virtually of which the DPAS has been in discussion with the SMHS Student Affairs and Admissions to discuss process and best practices. Afterall, retention rates all come down to selecting the best and brightest through the admissions process!

Faculty advisors will continue to be assigned early on in the program and institutional student support will be recommended as early as needs and deficiencies arise. Student satisfaction data will continue to be collected and analyzed annually with focus groups addressing areas of concern as needed. Keeping in mind that not all students will be perfectly satisfied, the DPAS strives for transparency related to the primary care mission and the virtual learning environment historically characteristic of this 50-year program. It is clear at the time of interview that these two aspects stand strong within the UND PA model so that prospective students are able to make an informed choice regarding their graduate professional education.

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

The DPAS is rated “on track” for this goal; however, continues to focus on aspects of retention as a continual process that is never fully complete. The growth of programs, sheer numbers of applicants and lack of quality in many of the applicants provides anxiety and angst for the future. While more work has been done in terms of accurately marketing the program (community outreach, pre-PA groups, stronger website, revised marketing materials) this workload remains a challenge for the department.

