

PA Education in North Dakota: Evolution over 50 Years

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Abstract

From the beginnings of the Physician Assistant (PA) profession from Duke University in 1967 and the start of the UND PA program in 1970, the PA profession has transformed on multiple levels. Neither health care nor education are static career fields and when they are combined there are a variety of forces of change to ensure students are well-prepared for medical practice. This requires educators and clinicians to continuously adjust their ways of thinking with regard to opportunities and challenges.

The PA Program in the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences has adapted to the needs of the state, the profession, and the nation in terms of producing PAs over the past fifty years. This poster presentation focuses on how these transitions and transformations have occurred, provides a current overview of educational structure and explores future projections and implications moving forward.

PA Studies at UND

Mission: to prepare students to become competent physician assistants working collaboratively with physicians, emphasizing primary care in rural and/or underserved communities.

Goals: to improve access to health care, alleviate shortages of primary care providers, and deliver quality, affordable and comprehensive health care to rural and/or underserved populations

Historical Timeline:

- 1970 – certificate program (12-months) designed to build upon existing clinical skills; modeled after “Medex” at the University of Washington
- 1972 – expanded the role of experienced community-oriented rural registered nurses and offered dual certification as FNP/PA
- 1992 – FNP program moved to the College of Nursing
- 2004 – became 24-month Master of Physician Assistant Studies degree providing a greater foundation in medical sciences
- 2006 – expanded admissions to include other experienced clinical health care professionals and science majors with health care experience (2014)

Meeting The Mission

Graduate Survey Results	Last 3 graduating classes (Average)
Reside in same city or town where they graduated (trained and retained as medical providers in home areas)	86%
Practicing in primary care (includes family medicine, urgent care, internal medicine, and women’s health)	69%
Practicing in a rural area (defined as 25,000 or less population)	48%

nearly 2,000 graduates who are employed throughout the U.S. (including Hawaii, Alaska and the Virgin Islands), Canada and overseas

National Scope: Then and Now

1967	2020
Three graduates	131,000 graduates (420 in ND)
One program	254 programs
A few PAs in primary care	PAs in every setting and specialty
Physician’s assistants	Physician Assistant (no apostrophe!)

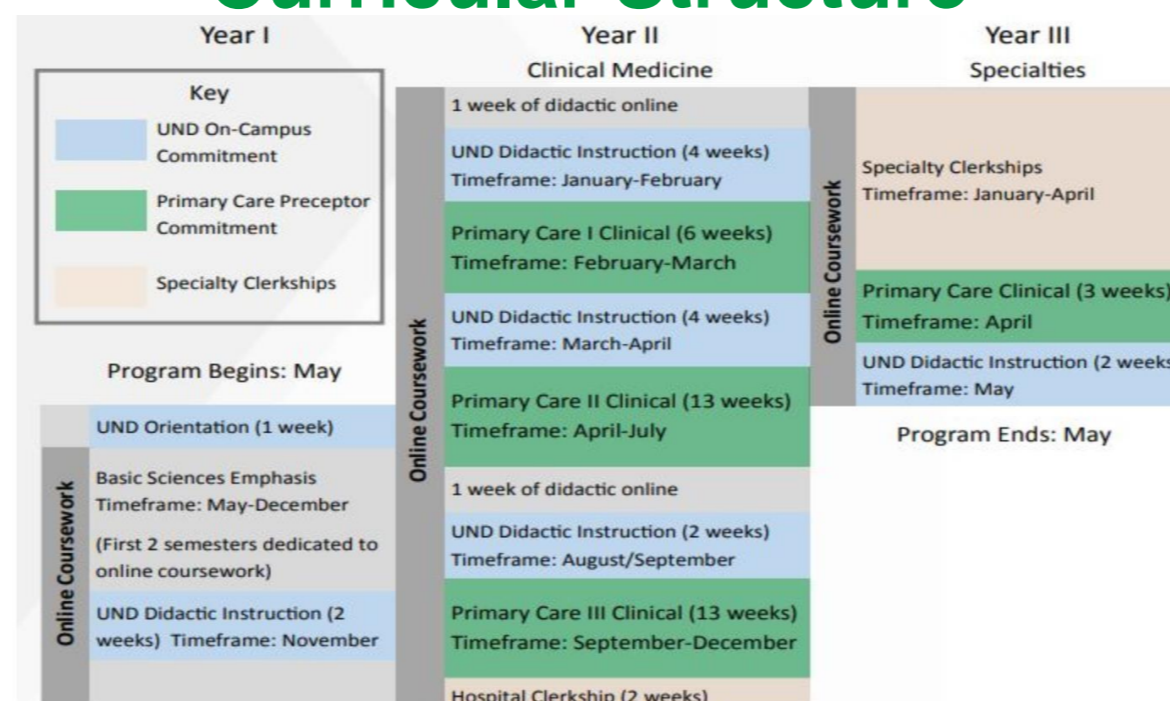


<https://pahx.org/>

UND Class of 1973

UND Class of 2020

Curricular Structure



A unique hybrid of online coursework combined with alternating classroom and clinical experiences focusing to primary care allowing students to complete their studies and clinical experiences in their home communities, whenever possible has remained the cornerstone of the UND PA program.

Adaptable for the Future

- Strength of profession: competent, compassionate graduates in a relatively short period of time (24 mo)
- Graduates are medical generalists who are infinitely adaptable (PAs are the “stem cells” of health care providers)
- Technical training includes research and scholarship to enhance the needs of our patients
- Continual advancements in technology including virtual synchronous and asynchronous classroom sessions; high fidelity simulation and virtual assessments
- Modernized and Advanced Practice Act: ND HB 1175 enhanced the ability to provide health care to the citizens of ND with the most significant change being the elimination of the requirement for a PA to have an agreement with a specific physician in most settings (8/1/19)

50 Years of Innovation and Ready for 50 More!