

**Program Progress Report
Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review
Physician Assistant Education Program**

Date of Site Visit: April 16-17, 2024

Progress Report Prepared by: Dr. Kristen Burrows

Recommendation #1: Academic Human Resources

- Explore pathways towards full-time unionised faculty roles, with benefits, dedicated time for teaching, research and service opportunities
- Consideration given to transition to the staffing model required by US accreditation standards US ARC-PA that require Full Time equivalents for core faculty, the Program Director, Academic Director, and the Clinical Director
- With the planned evolution of the curriculum to a graduate level, there is a need to address the needs of the PT faculty (>20) who currently lack post-bachelor's degrees. This is evolving as the core faculty already all have graduate degrees.
- Monitor the workloads and time commitments of the Chairs and should anticipate the potential need to increase time allocations of all Chairs, to better accommodate the workload and minimize the out-of- hours interruptions

Responsibility for Implementation:
Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows
Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:
Ongoing

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Many recommendations regarding academic human resources reflected a US-centric approach, in part given the US background of one of the reviewers. In the US, programs are more established and use titles like Program Director, Academic Director, and Clinical Director (all full-time faculty roles) which do not align with Ontario's medical education governance structures. In addition, the current US political climate has seen a complete revision regarding US program accreditation standards (including removal of required EDI standards) so the McMaster PA program is comfortable defending its current title allocations and governance structure.

At present, program leaders are selected based on their demonstrated competencies both in medical education and in their clinical roles, ascertained through prior contributions, clinical site feedback, participation in training, etc. As noted, core faculty have graduate degrees and we will continue to encourage that, especially with the planned evolution to a graduate level program. Any additional research curriculum will be supported by faculty with a graduate degree.

The program has taken steps to monitor workload and time commitment of new Chair roles (introduced late 2023/early 2024) through a faculty survey tool (first distributed Winter 2025 and will be circulated annually) and annual faculty role reviews (March/April annually). Faculty are continuously reminded they are not required to respond to student, program, or site requests outside of Monday-Friday workday hours. However, many faculty have full time clinical roles (shift work, weekend coverage, etc.) that alter their McMaster faculty work hours.

Progress (check one) ☐ Completed ✓ In Progress (ongoing) - faculty workload commitments will be continuously assessed ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments:
Dean's Comments: As the PA Program transitions to a Masters level program, and as the program continues to undergo significant expansion, we will continue to closely monitor faculty leader workload as described by Dr. Burrows. There are also a number of additional considerations that may affect workloads across portfolios. For example, we have sought and received additional funding from the Ministry of Health to update IT systems that should facilitate some work around clinical placements. At the same time, significant program expansion concurrent with expansion across multiple medical education programs, will place greater demand on the system to develop more placement capacity. These kinds of shifts in program delivery will have unpredictable effects and require ongoing attention, as described. We remain fully supportive of Dr. Burrow's and the Program's approach in this regard. As the program matures and evolves into a graduate-level offering, more deliberate planning will be required with respect to the development of full-time faculty roles. These positions may or may not follow traditional MUFA models. While MUFA full-time appointments offer important benefits, they also carry significant implications for faculty members who wish to maintain an active clinical practice as part of their professional portfolio. Over the coming transition period, we will explore the appropriate type, scope, and number of faculty appointments needed, with particular attention to individuals who are making substantial contributions to the program's mission and core operations. At present, the Faculty is actively exploring the creation of at least one full-time MUFA faculty position.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): QAC reviewed this report and had no further comments or concerns

Recommendation #2: Dedicated Faculty Development

- Dedicated faculty development supported by UGME/PGME resources
- Teaching and learning, scholarship and research, service opportunities are integral to the continued faculty leadership in the PA profession

Responsibility for Implementation:
Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows
Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:
Aligns with each academic fiscal year (i.e., April 2025)

Additional Notes/Commentary:

- Ongoing discussions with McMaster Faculty Development and Continuing Professional Development Office
- Collaboration with other PA Faculty Development Leads (i.e., University of Saskatchewan) to build and develop pan-Canadian PA faculty resources and to support faculty development
- New allocation of professional development funding for each faculty chair position for professional development (training, certifications, conferences, etc.) related to their role for fiscal year 2024-25 & 2025-2026 (going forward, dependent on MOH expansion funding)
- Re-implementation of a Curriculum Committee (now meets every 2 months in advance of Education Committee meetings)
- Creation of a faculty development email distribution list to facilitate sharing of resources, training opportunities, and available supports (both within McMaster and beyond when relevant to the PA profession)

Progress (check one)
☐ Completed
☒ In Progress (ongoing)
☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

Dean's Comments:
We are supportive of efforts made by the Program to advance this recommendation.

Faculty development in the School of Medicine which includes the PA Program, is under review at the moment. We will continue to look for opportunities to leverage shared resourcing in this area while also trying to maintain what is unique about each program and their respective faculty.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation #3: Faculty recruitment

- Effort should be made to recruit qualified and experienced PAs from beyond McMaster including from the national and global pool, to facilitate cross fertilization with diverse educational and professional backgrounds of more experienced PAs.

Responsibility for Implementation:
Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows
Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:
N/A

Additional Notes/Commentary:

There are currently no active job postings or unfilled positions within the program. The program posts job postings through HR when required and per HR guidelines. Less formal roles (preceptors, tutorial leads, etc.) are currently filled from a diverse group of individuals (excellent diversity in terms of educational and professional backgrounds). The program has no control over who applies to open faculty positions. Historically, McMaster graduates are most familiar with the curriculum pedagogy (problem-based learning) and are therefore most likely to apply for available positions. The program does provide orientation and training in PBL for new hires not familiar with problem-based learning.

Progress (check one)

☒ Completed

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

Dean's Comments:

We agree that learners benefit from access to a broad cross-section of educational backgrounds through their interactions with current faculty, particularly during the clinical training components of the program. We are also very fortunate to have alumni who demonstrate strong interest in contributing to the program's leadership.

As new leadership and faculty recruitment opportunities arise, we will carefully consider the value of diverse training backgrounds among candidates as one of several important attributes. This approach will help ensure that our training programs continue to reflect a range of perspectives while remaining aligned with the program's educational mission.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation #4: Administrative Support for Admissions

- Consider increased administrative support during admissions time to alleviate challenges processing large application numbers (specifically around GPA calculations)

Responsibility for Implementation:

Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows

Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira

Chair of Admissions, Dr. Michelle MacDonald

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

January 2026

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☐ Completed

☒ In Progress (ongoing)

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The PA Education Program recognizes that there has been a significant gap in administrative support, particularly in light of the doubling of program size in September 2024 and smaller incremental increases in enrollment in subsequent years. The number of applicants continues to grow annually, and it is no longer sustainable to manually process over 1,600 grade point averages within a single administrative role.

In response, an additional 1.0 FTE administrative support position was developed in fall 2025 to support program admissions as well as faculty and Chair-related functions, aligning with the program's recent expansion. This position was successfully filled, with the incumbent starting in January 2026.

The program continues to explore opportunities to improve admissions-related efficiencies, particularly with respect to GPA calculations, as part of its broader transition to a graduate-level program.

Dean's Comments:

We are supportive of the Program's response to this recommendation.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

Recommendation #5: Enhance Faculty Communication

- Implement monthly faculty meetings with agenda items and meeting minutes
- Facilitate collaboration across roles and support ongoing program initiatives effectively with faculty
- Program leadership should consider exploring regularly scheduled in-service/away days for academic enhancement and increased team building opportunities

Responsibility for Implementation:
Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows
Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:
Current/ongoing

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

☒ Completed

☐ In Progress

☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The PA education program supports bi-monthly Education Committee meetings and Curriculum Committee meetings. Requests for non-standing agenda items is circulated electronically prior to meetings, followed by a proposed agenda. Meeting minutes are distributed and approved at the next relevant committee meeting (this is also an accreditation requirement of Canadian PA Education Programs as well).

Unfortunately, the PA Program budget does not accommodate in-service/away days for academic enhancement. If expansion funding is provided by government, the program will consider implementing a modest annual faculty retreat, however this is not currently within the program budget. The program does circulate any available opportunities to faculty (including funding for professional development) and given none of the faculty roles are full time (all core faculty concurrently carry clinical responsibilities), it would be challenging to schedule away days.

Dean's Comments:

We are satisfied that the Program has an approach to the recommendation pertaining to regular faculty meetings.

With respect to the opportunity to have a larger program-wide meeting, the Vice-Dean, Education's office will work with the Program to deliver such an opportunity and then evaluate what is needed by the Program going forward.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

<u>Recommendation #6: Program transition from Bachelor to Masters program</u> • Explore transition to a Master program to remain competitive within the PA academic landscape in Canada
Responsibility for Implementation: Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Submission of Masters proposal draft – June 2025
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed ☒ In Progress (ongoing) ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: The PA program has been actively advocating to move to a graduate degree for several years recognizing the rapidly changing landscape of PA education across Canada (all PA programs outside of Ontario are offered at a graduate level). The Faculty of Health Sciences is supportive of transitioning the program to a graduate degree and the program is currently moving through the IQAP New Program Proposal Process (MSc PA Program Proposal submitted Fall 2025, IQAP site visit done February 2026) and the program is hopeful that final Senate approval will allow the proposal to go forward to Health Quality Ontario for approval in June 2026. The program aims to transition in Fall 2027 from an undergraduate to graduate level program.
Dean's Comments: We are highly supportive of the work done to make this transition.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

Recommendation #7: Enhance Communication Around Clerkship Lottery

- Reinforce to learners the lottery system rotation allocation and confidentiality of the process to combat perception of unfair distribution of clerkship rotations
- Reinforce to students that last-minute changes are outside program control

Responsibility for Implementation:

Chair of Clerkship, Sahand Ensafi
Chair of Clinical Education, Nancy Davis
Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows
Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira

Anticipated Timeline for Completion:

This is clarified annually and presented to PA learners multiple times in advance of year 2 clinical rotations.

Additional Notes/Commentary:

Progress (check one)

- ☒ Completed
☐ In Progress
☐ Other (please explain)

Department's Comments:

The program has repeatedly integrated information regarding the clerkship lottery throughout both years of the PA training program. Clerkship site allocations, program flexibility, travel and accommodation policies, and reminder to avoid last minute change request is covered in multiple presentations, clerkship specific information sessions, and stated verbally at monthly student/staff/faculty meetings. The program continues to be very explicit with year 1 learners regarding the distribution of clinical rotations and potential for unforeseen changes. This information is also included in the PAEP admissions package, discussed during the orientation week, and discussed during dedicated pre-clerkship information sessions.

Dean's Comments:

We acknowledge that student concerns around ideal clinical placements is an important issue requiring ongoing attention; nonetheless, with respect to ensuring that students are informed of the process, we are satisfied that the Program is making every, appropriate effort.

QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee):

See above

<u>Recommendation #8: Ongoing access to the Career Start Program</u>
• Efforts need to be made to ensure continued availability for employers
Responsibility for Implementation: N/A
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: N/A
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Completed ☐ In Progress ☒ Other (please explain) - no action required
Department's Comments: In 2010, the HealthForceOntario Branch of the Ministry of Health established a PA Career Start grant that provides partial salary support for new graduates of Ontario PA programs. This grant has been offered annually to employers interested in integrating a new graduate PA into various clinical settings. No action is required regarding this recommendation as it is outside of the control of the program and is fully at the discretion of the Ministry of Health. The Assistant Dean does meet regularly with the health workforce branch of the Ministry of Health and provides ongoing feedback regarding the PA career start program (including timing, graduate eligibility, and most recently in discussions around alignment with new PA regulation under the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario). However, the PA program has no mechanism to ensure that funding is available to potential PA employers.
Dean's Comments: The Program, and more specifically, the current Assistant Dean, has advocated unrelentlessly to advance the PA profession in Ontario (and Canada), and to put as many supports and resources in place to optimize the profession's successful delivery of healthcare to Ontarians. This advocacy work has been crucial to achieve successes thus far in a relatively new profession within our province; however, as in the case of this recommendation, while we have and can continue to advocate strongly, this kind of funding arrangement is entirely at the discretion and control of the government.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above

<u>Recommendation #9: Regular clinical site visits</u> Scheduling of regular site visits to address emerging issues with preceptors, further understanding of the PA role and expectations of students, especially in rural rotations
Responsibility for Implementation: Chair of Clerkship, Sahand Ensafi Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows
Anticipated Timeline for Completion: Ongoing (continuous quality improvement)
Additional Notes/Commentary:
Progress (check one) ☐ Complete ✓ In Progress (ongoing) ☐ Other (please explain)
Department's Comments: The PA Education Program has taken several steps to boost regular clinical site visits. With the new faculty roles like Chair, Clerkship, the program now has additional resources to conduct site visits. With program expansion, clinical site resources were focused on ensuring enough sites were recruited to support the training of the expanded cohort of year 2 learners. The program has connected with the Undergraduate Medical Education Program and MacCARE program to understand their site visit process and to avoid duplicating efforts (PA learners share many of the same clinical training sites as MD students). The PA program is developing a framework for site assessment and to consistently gather feedback across all sites. Site visits will commence in fall 2026 once the expanded cohort of learners have started their clerkship year.
Dean's Comments: We are supportive of the Program's efforts to satisfy this recommendation. Additionally, the Vice-Dean, Education will work with the Associate Deans of UGME and PGME, as well as the PA Program Assistant Dean to understand if resources for site evaluation can be better shared amongst programs.
QAC Comments (to be filled in by Quality Assurance Committee): See above