



## **Pre-Physician Assistant Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. Is 5 years long enough to become a PA?**

The actual Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) courses do not begin until level 4 (Year 4), and the PAS classes last a traditional length of 24 months. The first 3 years of study consist of undergraduate Human Biology program courses or other courses that prepare students for entry to the PAS program. Students will be designated as pre-PA after acceptance by the admissions and progression committee. Pre-PA students completing the accelerated undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Human Biology will complete all requirements of the traditional Human Biology program by taking the maximum course load every semester. Some PAS courses will contribute to the completion of the bachelor's degree as elective courses.

### **2. Are there other PA programs in the country similar to CSM's program?**

Yes. There are over 30 programs in the country with programs that allow students to complete graduate program prerequisites while earning a Bachelor's or other degree. These programs produce successful and competent PA's as evidenced by their certifying exam pass rates and their ongoing accreditation by the ARC-PA, the PA accrediting body.

### **3. How do I become a pre-Physician Assistant Student at College of Saint Mary?**

Pre-PA is a status assigned to students at College of Saint Mary following their application and successful acceptance to the college and the pre-PA status. Applicants must meet all of the admission criteria for pre-PA to be eligible for this status. Both external applicants and current CSM students may apply for the pre-PA status. Once application materials are received, they will be reviewed by an admissions and progression committee comprised of the Physician Assistant Studies program faculty and staff. Qualified applicants will be considered for an interview and possible acceptance for into the pre-PA status. The application process is a competitive process, and due to the limited number of available seats (30) in the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program, not all applicants meeting the minimum admission criteria will be offered acceptance into the pre-PA status.

#### **4. Is my daughter ready as a freshman?**

If accepted into the pre-PA status, CSM will provide your daughter the opportunities and resources needed for academic excellence, compassionate service, and leadership. Small class size will provide significant individualized attention. Community service and patient-care opportunities will be an important aspect of her preparation to become a Physician Assistant. CSM will help your daughter develop into a competent, caring medical professional.

#### **5. Will I have to complete all 5 years?**

Students accepted into the pre-PA status are assigned a level (1 – 3) according to the extent to which they have completed prerequisite courses necessary to start the graduate Physician Assistant program. Levels 4 and 5 are the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program. Levels 1-3 are for students accepted into the pre-PA status. Qualified applicants' transcripts will be reviewed and recommended for acceptance at the appropriate level to the PAS Program Director. Due to the limited number of available seats (30) in the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies, seats may not be available at all levels. Students will be admitted to the program at the highest level for which they are qualified AND in which seats exist. Students are accepted into Levels 1-4 only.

#### **6. What program of study will I pursue as a pre-Physician Assistant Student?**

The majority of students with pre-PA status are pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Human Biology because the pre-requisite courses for the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program align with the Human Biology curriculum. However, additional programs and majors at College of Saint Mary are available to students with the pre-Physician Assistant status, depending on the student's past academic experience. The admissions and progression committee will work with you and help determine what program of study is most beneficial to you and your future career goals. All pre-PA status students must complete all of the courses required for admission to the Master of Science in the Physician Assistant Studies Program regardless of the program of study they choose.

#### **7. Will my daughter be learning using cadavers?**

CSM is one of a very small number of non-medical schools in the region to have an operating cadaver lab. The lab is used for anatomic demonstration in Anatomy and Physiology classes, and an upper-level undergraduate Gross Anatomy course is offered every Fall to students wishing to pursue an in-depth exploration of human anatomy prior to beginning the PAS courses in level 4. Beginning in level 4, PAS students will complete additional upper-level anatomy courses utilizing both dissection and prosection.

#### **8. Is the board exam transferable to other states?**

The national PA board certification examination (PANACE) given by the NCCPA will allow students to apply for a license in any state.

### **9. What is the accreditation process?**

Physician assistant education is accredited through the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). College of Saint Mary has been granted developmental status by the ARC-PA with a provisional accreditation decision in March 2016. Accreditation - Provisional is an accreditation status granted when the plans and resource allocation, if fully implemented as planned, of a proposed program that has not yet enrolled students appear to demonstrate the program's ability to meet the ARC-PA *Standards* or when a program holding accreditation-provisional status appears to demonstrate continued progress in complying with the *Standards* as it prepares for the graduation of the first class (cohort) of students. College of Saint Mary may officially start the physician assistant studies portion of the curriculum once provisionally accredited. Accreditation-Provisional does not ensure any subsequent accreditation status, but any student beginning in a provisionally accredited program qualifies to take the national board certification examination following graduation.

### **10. How is it possible to accept students if the PAS program is not accredited?**

College of Saint Mary's Physician Assistant Studies Program has applied for Accreditation - Provisional from the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). College of Saint Mary's Physician Assistant Studies Program anticipates matriculating its first class in August 2016, pending achieving Accreditation - Provisional status at the March 2016 ARC-PA meeting. Accreditation - Provisional is an accreditation status granted when the plans and resource allocation, if fully implemented as planned, of a proposed program that has not yet enrolled students appear to demonstrate the program's ability to meet the ARC-PA *Standards* or when a program holding accreditation-provisional status appears to demonstrate continued progress in complying with the *Standards* as it prepares for the graduation of the first class (cohort) of students.

Pre-physician assistant status students are currently being accepted and under all circumstances will be eligible to complete a degree in their current program of study. If the Physician Assistant Studies program does not receive accreditation in March 2016, College of Saint Mary will continue to seek accreditation as soon as possible. CSM students would be eligible to apply to other physician assistant programs around the country.

### **11. What if the PAS program does not receive accreditation in March 2016?**

College of Saint Mary will continue to seek accreditation as soon as possible. In the meantime, students would be eligible to apply to other physician assistant programs around the country.

### **12. What other programs are accredited at CSM?**

The University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The CSM Occupational Therapy, Nursing, Paralegal and Education programs are accredited through their own respective accrediting agencies. Each of these programs went through a similar application process and received accreditation in their first application.

**13. What is the pre-Physician Assistant admissions process?**

Admission for pre-PA status will occur through a rolling admissions process. If minimum requirements are met, the Admissions and Progression Committee will review the application and decide if an interview will be offered to the applicant. Due to the competitive nature of the PAS program, meeting minimum requirements does not ensure an invitation for an interview or acceptance as a pre-PA status student. Following the interview, the Admissions and Progression Committee will make a recommendation to the PAS Program Director, who determines acceptance into the pre-PA status. Applicants will be notified of the decision via letter.

**14. What will happen to completed applications once 30 students are accepted at any level?**

CSM will not accept more than 30 students at each level. Students may enroll in a program of study at CSM and be assigned to a wait list for pre-PA status slots that may become available in subsequent years.

**15. Why do I have to remain at full-time status as a pre-Physician Assistant student?**

Pre-PA status students at CSM have a guaranteed seat in the Master of Science Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) program if they meet the pre-PA progression criteria (PAS admission criteria). The pre-PA progression criteria includes a requirement of maintaining full-time status. This full-time status while completing the pre-PA course requirements will assist in preparing you for the heavy workload of the PAS program and increase the likelihood that you will be successful once matriculated into the PAS program. CSM feels it is necessary to demonstrate this ability in order to ensure a seat in the PAS program. Students who do not wish to maintain full-time status cannot remain a CSM pre-PA status student but may still apply to the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program as a non-pre-PA applicant at level 4

**16. How were the pre-Physician Assistant level requirements determined?**

Pre-PA is a status assigned to students at College of Saint Mary through an admissions and acceptance process. Students with this status are required to complete courses intended to expose students to a broad range of information in the disciplines of biology, chemistry, physics, math, and psychology. These courses will serve to increase students' likelihood of success in the PAS program. This plan of study was intentionally designed to align with the undergraduate Human Biology major in order to establish a simple pathway through these courses. All pre-PA status students must complete all pre-PA requirements in order to be eligible for acceptance into the PAS program as a CSM pre-PA student. However, required courses may be taken in programs of studies and majors other than Human Biology. Substitutions of more difficult courses or courses taken in alternative sequencing may be permitted based on a student's background and academic path.

**17. Why do CSM pre-Physician Assistant students have to take additional courses other than just the prerequisites to the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program?**

Pre-PA status students at CSM have a guaranteed seat in the Master of Science Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) program if they meet the pre-PA progression criteria (PAS admission criteria). The pre-PA progression criteria include coursework that will increase the likelihood that students will be academically prepared when they begin the graduate PAS program. In addition, students must maintain full-time status. CSM feels it is important for students to remain full-time students while enrolled in rigorous courses in order to demonstrate their academic ability. Students who do not wish to complete all the pre-PA progression requirements always retain the option to apply to the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies program as a non-pre-PA applicant.

**18. Does CSM accept men as pre-Physician Assistant student?**

CSM is a women's college at the undergraduate level, so only women are eligible for the pre-PA status. The Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (PAS) program has an admissions preference for current CSM pre-PA students. However, if all 30 seats are not filled at the beginning of the PAS program (Level 4), the seats will be filled with other applicants. In that situation, men are eligible to apply to begin the graduate PAS program.

**19. Will I have enough money available to complete the program?**

College of Saint Mary is committed to affordability. We will work with you throughout your time at the University to ensure that finances do not prohibit you from reaching your academic goals. The first step is for you to apply to the University and submit your FAFSA. Once we receive your FAFSA information, and you are accepted to the University, you will receive a financial aid award letter. This letter will include information about scholarships and grants the College of Saint Mary is offering you, as well as your individual federal and state grant and loan eligibility. Once you receive your award letter, we would encourage you to meet with a member of our financial aid staff to answer any questions you may have.

**20. Are there special scholarships and loan repayment options available to Physician Assistant students?**

Yes. There are a variety of scholarships and loan repayment programs available to both undergraduate and graduate students that qualify. These scholarships and loan repayment programs may have additional requirements that must be met after graduation. For more information, please visit the American Academy of Physician Assistants webpage regarding financial aid: [http://www.aapa.org/your\\_pa\\_career/pa\\_students/resources/item.aspx?id=913](http://www.aapa.org/your_pa_career/pa_students/resources/item.aspx?id=913)